

**MINUTES**  
**MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL**  
**5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5, 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 Reverend J. D. Martin, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

Mayor Matheson introduced members of the 2024 Leadership Lowndes Class who were in attendance at the Council Meeting. He also introduced Kasmira Smith, the new Government Reporter for the Valdosta Daily Times.

**AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS**

Mayor Matheson stated that the Special Presentation by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs for the re-designation of the City of Valdosta Main Street as a Georgia Exceptional Main Street City (GEMS) has been cancelled.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The Minutes from the Special Called Meeting of September 7, 2023 and the September 21, 2023 Regular Meeting are forthcoming.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**ORDINANCE NO. 2023-25, AN ORDINANCE FOR A CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT (CUP) FOR AN EVENT CENTER IN A HIGHWAY-COMMERCIAL (C-H) ZONING DISTRICT**

Consideration of an Ordinance for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for an Event Center in a Highway-Commercial (C-H) Zoning District as requested by Kristie Jenkins (File No. CU-2023-03). The property is located at 2525 North Ashley Street. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their September 25, 2023 Regular Meeting and recommended approval with no conditions (6-2 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning Director, stated that Kristie Jenkins is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for an Event Center in a Highway-Commercial (C-H) Zoning District. The property consists of 3.77 acres located at 2525 North Ashley Street. This is the Garden Plaza commercial center located along the east side of North Ashley Street, south of Emory Street, and directly across from the North Campus of Valdosta State University. The applicant is leasing Suite "M" and Suite "O" (combined adjacent tenant spaces) which are located near the middle of the Plaza, and which were previously occupied by the 25 North restaurant/nightclub. The property is located within an Institutional Activity Center (IAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan and is also located within the Urban Commercial Corridor Overlay District (UCCOD). The applicant has stated she would like to use this as a home base (business office) for her existing mobile Fun Time Party Rental & More business, as well as hosting events on the premises. The applicant has submitted a very well-written Letter of Intent which adequately describes the scope and operation of the proposed venture; however, the submitted floor plan/sketch indicates a bar area with an adjoining kitchen, a stage, and seating for 50+ persons. This gives the impression of a facility that is a little more intensive and with more of a focus on nighttime activities, than what the Letter describes. Nonetheless, Staff's major concern with the proposed use is with the deficiencies of the site itself, particularly with its general lack of adequate on-site parking and lack of available overflow. This overall commercial center is non-compliant in terms of minimum required parking (that is available), and functional design of the parking layout. The commercial "plaza" portion of the site (excluding the motel portion) contains 16,000 square feet GFA which requires a minimum of 72 parking spaces. There are only 49 spaces in this portion of the site, and some of these have sub-standard dimensions. The existing ingress and egress from the street and to the buildings themselves is adequate; however, the site layout, in terms of parking space dimensions and access aisles, is substandard in places. This overall layout design has a high potential to cause on-site congestion.

Even with three to four of the existing storefronts being currently vacant, Staff has witnessed the parking lot being 100% full on multiple occasions. Adding another commercial use that has the potential for greater occupancy than a typical business in this complex could be very problematic. It should also be pointed out that the applicant currently has two active Business Licenses for their party rental business at 1412 East Park Avenue and also at 2157 Bemiss Road. Each of these locations is within an existing larger commercial center with significantly more parking available and overall better site access than the subject property. Either of these locations, or another similarly conducive location in the City, would seem to be a much better choice. Staff believes that the proposed use, as described in the Letter of Intent, is a very good business model and proposal, but it needs to be in a location where such a business can flourish without potentially overloading its site capacity. Staff did consider recommending substantial conditions of approval (such as very limited occupancy and hours of operation) in order to mitigate the potential impacts; however, such limitations seemed unduly extreme for the proposed use when the simpler solution would be to find a more suitable location. Staff found the request inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Conditional Use Review Criteria and recommended denial. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their September 25, 2023 meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Conditional Use Review Criteria, and recommended approval with no conditions (6-2 Vote).

Kristie Jenkins, Applicant, spoke in favor of the request. Ms. Jenkins stated that she wanted to address the parking concern. There is a total of 49 parking spots in the front and 26 in the back. It is paved and lined. Initially, there was a fence there and she explained to the Property Manager that it stops the flow of traffic. There were two sides to the fence and there was a closing door and she removed that whole door. She spoke with Roger Budd who is the owner of the adjacent property. All of the events will be pre-booked in order for her to make accommodations for parking. That parking is available to rent if needed on a weekly basis as long as she lets Mr. Budd know 14 days in advance.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A **MOTION** was made by Councilman Gibbs to approve a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for an Event Center in a Highway-Commercial (C-H) Zoning District for property located at 2525 North Ashley Street as requested by Kristie Jenkins with the following seven conditions: (1) Approval shall be granted in the name of the applicant only for an Event Center in C-H Zoning, and only for indoor events utilizing existing Suites M & O of the subject property. (2) Hours of operation shall be limited to within the hours of 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m. daily. (3) Total maximum facility occupancy shall be limited to no more than 25 persons before 7:00 p.m., and no more than 45 persons after 7:00 p.m. (4) All events shall be private and scheduled in advance with attendance numbers pre-determined and managed by the applicant. There shall be no open commercial ticket sales, entry cover-charges, or other forms of open public admittance. There shall be no live music entertainment, and all sounds generated by the facility shall be in strict adherence to the City's adopted Noise Ordinance. (5) All food and beverage served on the premises shall be provided as part of the scheduled event (not sold) and prepared by locally-licensed caterers or by the private lessee(s) of the facility, as pre-arranged through the applicant. All alcoholic beverages shall be served by a licensed alcoholic beverage caterer in accordance with City Ordinance. (6) There shall no outdoor temporary signage nor attention-getting devices associated with any of the events. (7) Conditional Use approval shall expire one (1) year from the date of approval if no City business license has been obtained by that date. Councilman Carroll seconded the motion. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether those conditions were suggested or put on there. Matt Martin stated that Staff had recommended denial of the request and that is how it was presented to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission many times entertains conditions of approval. This was given to the Planning Commission as food for thought if they wanted to consider approval with conditions. These might be some of the topic areas that they could include in the condition language. The Planning Commission still opted to recommend approval without conditions. Because this listing was in the Planning Commission review of the request, he included them in the City Council Packet so that they would have the same opportunity if you wanted. Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether they had to agree to the seven conditions. Matt Martin stated that the seven conditions were listed and Staff prepared the language for the conditions and they are in the Council Packet for consideration. The motion was adopted (5-2) with Councilwoman Tooley and Councilman Howard voting in opposition to enact Ordinance No. 2023-25, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

**ORDINANCE NO. 2023-26, AN ORDINANCE TO REZONE 2.64 ACRES FROM SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (R-10) TO HIGHWAY-COMMERCIAL (C-H) ZONING DISTRICT**

Consideration of an Ordinance to rezone 2.64 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-10) to Highway-

Commercial (C-H) as requested by St. Augustine Road Church of Christ (File No. VA-2023-13). The property is located at 713 North St. Augustine Road. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their September 25, 2023 Regular Meeting and recommended approval (8-0 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning Director, stated that St. Augustine Road Church of Christ is requesting to rezone 2.64 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-10) to Highway-Commercial (C-H). The property is located at 713 North St. Augustine Road which is along the east side of the road immediately north of Hightower Creek and 250 feet south of the intersection with Harmon Drive. The property currently contains a well-established Church facility which is a permitted use in C-H Zoning and requires a CUP in R-10 Zoning. The property is located within a Community Activity Center (CAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan which allows the possibility of C-H Zoning. It should be noted that R-10 is not a compliant Zoning District within the CAC Character Area (not intensive enough). The property has been developed and utilized as a Church for more than 50 years, and there are no immediate plans for change; however, the Church is contemplating the possibility to expand their facility in the future or perhaps to increase its marketability for commercial redevelopment. Commercial Zoning would be beneficial under either scenario. The property is located within what is now a well-established commercial corridor along North St. Augustine Road. As such, the surrounding Zoning patterns in the area are dominated by mostly C-H Zoning along the corridor itself, with R-10 Zoning for the residential area behind the property. The surrounding land uses follow the same general pattern as the Zoning; however, the redevelopment trends in the area have been for a slow expansion of commercial development (such as the recently constructed Candlewood Suites hotel, and the Hog-n-Bones restaurant to the north) as well as conversion of some of the Single-Family Residential properties to Multi-Family apartments. There was also the recent rezoning of the adjacent vacant property to the north, for a proposed car wash facility. Even with no immediately-proposed changes to the property, it should be underscored that the existing R-10 Zoning is not consistent with the Character Area nor is it consistent with a well-established Commercial corridor. Therefore, the proposed rezoning of this property will help further a more consistent zoning pattern for the area and help facilitate possible development/redevelopment of the subject property in the future. Staff found the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP) and recommended approval. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their September 25, 2023 Regular Meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP), and recommended approval (8-0 Vote).

Devan Guthrie, 3953 Johnston Road, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Guthrie stated that he is the Minister and one of the Elders at the St. Augustine Road Church. One of the reasons that they have had talks congregations about the possibility of merging some smaller Churches with them and eventually selling this property and moving to another location that is not so commercial. It just seemed necessary to them to rezone it at the present time.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

**A MOTION** made by Councilman McIntyre, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2023-26, an Ordinance to rezone 2.64 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-10) to Highway-Commercial (C-H) for property located at 713 North St. Augustine Road as requested by St. Augustine Road Church of Christ, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

**ORDINANCE NO. 2023-27, AN ORDINANCE TO REZONE 3.96 ACRES FROM HIGHWAY-COMMERCIAL (C-H)(COUNTY) TO HIGHWAY-COMMERCIAL (C-H)(CITY) ZONING DISTRICT**

Consideration of an Ordinance to rezone 3.96 acres from Highway-Commercial (C-H)(County) to Highway-Commercial (C-H)(City) as requested by Edward Jennings LLC (File No. VA-2023-14). The property is located at 1869 Madison Highway. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their September 25, 2023 Regular Meeting and recommended approval (8-0 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning Director, stated that Agenda Items (c) and (d) are an annexation and rezoning request for the same property by the same Applicant. In the past when they have had these kinds of requests they are considered them as one and hold the Public Hearing for both of them as one; however, when it comes time to make a motion and vote, Council will need to vote on the rezoning request first and then the annexation. The rezoning is the first case (File No. VA-2023-14) and the annexation is File No. VA-2023-15. Edward Jennings LLC, represented by Kevin Hollis, is requesting to rezone 3.96 acres from Highway-Commercial (C-H)(County), to

Highway-Commercial (C-H)(City). The property is located at 1869 Madison Highway which is across from the Valdosta Regional Airport on the east side of the highway between Horace Avenue and Ward Avenue. The property currently contains a single-family residence. The applicant is proposing to demolish the existing residence and redevelop the property with four speculative commercial buildings (12,000 square feet each) around a shared parking area and shared access driveway from Madison Highway. The applicant is also requesting annexation of this same property, which is being reviewed concurrently under case File No. VA-2023-15. The property is located within a Community Activity Center (CAC) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan which allows the possibility of C-H Zoning (the Character Area designation will remain the same after annexation). The property is also located within the Valdosta Regional Airport Overlay District which may have some limitations on the final proposed uses/development of the property, and these are customarily addressed at the time of actual development (plan review process). The existing land use and zoning patterns in this area are dominated by the Valdosta Regional Airport property (industrial zoning), as well as Commercial Zoning along the east side of Madison Highway, and Residential Zoning for the interior rural neighborhood to the east of that. In spite of its former residential use, this property was rezoned to C-H (in the County) by its former owner in 2009 for speculative commercial development. That development never materialized and the new owner (the applicant) is wanting to increase the property's viability for commercial development by making it accessible to City utilities and other services. Staff found the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP) and recommended approval. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their September 25, 2023 Regular Meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP), and recommended approval (8-0 Vote).

Kevin Hollis, 1525 BCT Gin Road, Quitman, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Hollis stated that he would be glad to answer any questions that Council may have on the rezoning and annexation.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

**A MOTION** made by Councilman McIntyre, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2023-27, an Ordinance to rezone 3.96 acres from Highway-Commercial (C-H)(County) to Highway-Commercial (C-H)(City) for property located at 1869 Madison Highway as requested by Edward Jennings LLC, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

#### **ORDINANCE NO. 2023-28, AN ORDINANCE TO ANNEX 3.96 ACRES INTO THE CITY OF VALDOSTA**

Consideration of an Ordinance to annex 3.96 acres into the City of Valdosta as requested by Edward Jennings LLC (File No. VA-2023-15). The property is located at 1869 Madison Highway. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their September 25, 2023 Regular Meeting and recommended approval (8-0 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning Director, stated that there is no additional information to add to the annexation.

No one spoke in favor of the request.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

**A MOTION** made by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman McIntyre, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2023-28, an Ordinance to annex 3.96 acres into the City of Valdosta for property located at 1869 Madison Highway as requested by Edward Jennings LLC, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

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

Consideration of bids for a Front-End Loader Dumpster Refuse Truck for the Public Works Department (Bid No. 05-23-24).

Anthony Musgrove, Public Works Director, stated that the Public Works Department needs to purchase a new front loader dumpster garbage truck due to the age of the existing truck and serviceability. The truck is used for running a commercial route for emptying dumpsters throughout the City. The new vehicle will replace Line Item #27-10 which is a 2004 model. This is in the Council-approved Budget for this Fiscal Year. A single sealed bid

was received on September 12, 2023 from Solid Waste Applied Technologies in the amount of \$360,000. Several other vendors did not respond to the invitation to bid. The last truck the City purchased like this was \$293,765 which was two years ago. The price increase is due to rising labor costs, steel prices, and product demand. Anthony Musgrove, Public Works Director, recommended that Council approve the bid submitted by Solid Waste Applied Technologies in the amount of \$360,000 for a Front-End Loader Dumpster Refuse Truck for the Public Works Department.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the bid submitted by Solid Waste Applied Technologies in the amount of \$360,000 for a Front-End Loader Dumpster Refuse Truck for the Public Works Department.

## **LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS**

Consideration of a request for payment per an agreement with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) Consent Order EPD-WP-9424.

Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, stated that on September 15, 2023, the City signed and agreed to comply to all conditions of Consent Order EPD-WP-9424. This Consent Order was issued per violations of Georgia Water Quality Rules, Georgia Water Quality Act, and National Pollutant Discharge Eliminations System (NPDES) Permits from the period of September 1, 2022 through February 28, 2023. These violations are expounded upon further within the attached Consent Order but, generally, they are as follows: (1) Discharge permit violations at Mud Creek WPCP, (2) Discharge permit violations at Withlacoochee WPCP, (3) One Mile Branch fish kill, and (4) Numerous overflows and spills into State Waters between January 2022 and February 2023. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) may not permit violations of any kind of the Georgia Water Quality Rules or Georgia Water Quality Act. In response to reported violations, the EPD may issue a Consent Order from the office of the Director to penalize violations and provide guidance to municipalities to mitigate the risk of future violations. There are five conditions for compliance to the Consent Order which predominantly center around submittal and Departmental review of Standard Operating Procedures for a variety of scenarios. Condition (1) is the payment of a \$56,139.30 cash penalty for violations listed in the Consent Order. The City is currently operating in compliance with Consent Order EPD-WP-8904, which was executed on August 11, 2020. This Consent Order, EPD-WP-9424, is a new and a unique Order with which the City must comply. Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the request for a fine payment in the amount of \$56,139.30 as per the agreement with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) Consent Order EPD-WP-9424.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the request for payment of the fine in the amount of \$56,139.30 as per the agreement with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) Consent Order EPD-WP-9424.

Consideration of a request for partial payment of emergency repairs for a sanitary sewer main collapse at Highway 84 and Blanchard Street.

Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, stated that on February 16, 2023, a significant reduction in flow was detected at the Mud Creek Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP). The Utilities Department Staff immediately commenced an investigation to identify the location of the system loss. A collapsed 21" diameter sanitary sewer trunkline was located near the intersection of Highway 84 and Blanchard Street on the southside of the CSX railroad. The point of initial line failure is identified on the context map with a green circle icon. Utilities Department Staff selected RPI to establish a temporary system bypass and to perform any emergency repair work necessary to repair the deteriorated lines. Generally, emergency repair work is identified and completed quickly, and the work scope and billing are presented to the City Council after the fact for approval. In this case, the completion of the emergency repair work has been substantially delayed due to system analysis/determination of cause of failure, construction plan development, CSX, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) permitting, weather, and availability of materials. Repair work should commence by mid-October once the materials are delivered. Once the emergency repair work is completed, City Staff will present the remainder of the scope of work and billing to City Council for approval. This Agenda Item serves to approve intermediate billing for the past six months of work completed by the contractor. The scope of work which has been completed so far can be generally described as follows: (1) Install and operate emergency bypass from February 16, 2023 to August 10, 2023, (2) Easement clearing in preparation for emergency repair work and video inspection work, and (3)

Construct gravel road from Park Avenue to provide access through the City's utility easement for pipe cleaning and video inspection equipment. The temporary bypass was established by directionally boring an 8" fused HDPE pipe under Highway 84 and between rail ties on the adjacent CSX rail line (between manholes M205 and M196). Due to the volume of flows and upstream system constraints, a secondary diesel bypass pump was installed to assist the principal bypass pump during peak flows and wet weather. In an effort to determine the cause of the line collapse, RPI was directed to video inspect 5,620 linear feet of existing Knights Creek trunkline. The easement which provides access to a significant portion of the trunkline was densely overgrown and impossible to access for delivery of video inspection and line cleaning equipment. RPI was directed to clear the easements of vegetation and install a gravel road to facilitate access. Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, recommended that Council authorize payment of \$2,121,128 to RPI for this emergency repair work.

Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether they had the equipment to make the repairs right now he had previously mentioned that it was on backorder. Jason Barnes stated they are waiting on the materials and they are hopeful to receive that by mid-October so that they can start working on the other two areas.

Councilman Gibbs stated that there is a separate pricing for emergency fix and inquired as to whether the red portion on the map between 198 and 196 emergency as well. Jason Barnes stated that it is part of what they are going to repair now but the green M202 from 205 is what Councilman Gibbs is talking about. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether they would have a different pricing for that. Jason Barnes stated that was correct. Councilman Gibbs inquired about the yellow 198 to 202. Jason Barnes stated that they would wait on that portion and put it out for bid. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that everything in red when we had the problem during the collapse, they found 198 to 196 that had collapsed as well. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether it has collapsed and is not currently working. Richard Hardy stated that we have a by-pass. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether they have a bypass from 196 to 198. Jason Barnes stated that they were by-passing that. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether that was part of the emergency. Jason Barnes stated that was correct. Councilman Gibbs stated that he did not want to wait and put out for bid and then 30 or 60 days later it collapses as well and then they are paying an emergency fee. Jason Barnes stated that what was in red was just as bad from M205 to 202 and is pretty much the same as 198 to 196. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to when they would put the yellow out for bid. Jason Barnes stated that as soon as they get this done. It is not in as bad a shape as what is in red. They do not want to wait too long so they do not have an emergency repair. Councilman Gibbs stated that he wanted to be proactive and get the bids out there for it and that way we can go ahead and get it fixed while they are there instead of it collapsing two months from now and we have to pay two and a half times the price because of the emergency repair. Jason Barnes stated that their goal and plan is to go ahead and get the red fixed and then move on to the yellow and get it done as well. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether they have to wait until the red is finished to put it out for bid. Richard Hardy stated that we do not. Right now, everything in red is a must. Councilman Gibbs stated that he was just asking if they can go ahead and put a bid out for 198 to 202 and get the ball rolling. Richard Hardy stated that they could do that.

Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to whether the Project from 198 to 196 was the area where the pecan factory building is located. Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, stated that was not the area. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that it was past the EOC building. This is in the Consent Order to get repairs. We have identified it and that is part of what we have to do to move forward. We have created a timeline based on funding and what we are required to do by the Consent Order.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-1) to authorize the partial payment of \$2,121,128 to RPI Underground for the emergency repairs for a sanitary sewer main collapse at Highway 84 and Blanchard Street with Councilwoman Tooley voting in opposition.

Consideration of a request for additional funding to cover the cost for the removal and disposal of an additional 100,000 cubic yards of storm debris.

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 an additional 100,000 cubic yards of debris beyond initial estimates from its right-of-ways. This debris constitutes a hazard to public health and safety and needs to be removed expeditiously. We are currently faced with a pressing issue that requires immediate attention and financial support. The aftermath has resulted in a significant amount of storm debris, which poses a severe threat to public safety and the environment. In our

ongoing cleanup efforts, we have encountered an unforeseen challenge which is the need to remove and process an additional 100,000 cubic yards of storm debris that was not originally accounted for in our initial budget. Given the urgency of the situation and the potential risks associated with leaving the debris untreated, we are seeking financial authorization in the amount of \$1,825,000 to cover the cost of (our current vendor) Ashbritt to safely remove and dispose of this additional storm debris. The request is anticipated to be funded by FEMA reimbursement with a 25% non-Federal match. There is a possibility of GEMA participation, but no percentage is known at this time. Any local responsibility would be from User Fees. In the interim, the costs will be cash flowed by short term debt (short term Bank of America loan) if necessary. (1) Approve the additional funding in the amount of \$1,825,000 for removing and disposing of this additional storm debris, (2) Do not approve the additional funding for \$1,825,000.00 for removing and disposing of this additional storm debris. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the additional funding for Ashbritt in the amount of \$1,825,000 for removing and disposing of this additional storm debris.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Howard, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the additional funding for Ashbritt in the amount of \$1,825,000 for removing and disposing of this additional storm debris.

Consideration of a request for additional funding to cover the cost for monitoring and the removal and disposal of an additional 100,000 cubic yards of storm debris.

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 an additional 100,000 cubic yards of debris beyond initial estimates from its right-of- ways. This debris constitutes a hazard to public health and safety and needs to be removed expeditiously. We are currently faced with a pressing issue that requires immediate attention and financial support. The aftermath has resulted in a significant amount of storm debris, which poses a severe threat to public safety and the environment. In our ongoing cleanup efforts, we have encountered an unforeseen challenge and that is the need to remove an additional 100,000 cubic yards of storm debris that was not originally accounted for in our initial budget. 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, we are seeking financial authorization in the amount of \$548,000 to cover the cost of Thompson Consulting (our current vendor) to monitor and document removal and disposal of this additional storm debris. The request is anticipated to be funded by FEMA reimbursement with a 25% non-Federal match. There is a possibility of GEMA participation, but no percentage is known at this time. Any local responsibility would be from User Fees. In the interim, the costs will be cash flowed by short term debt (short term Bank of America loan) if necessary. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the additional funding for Thompson Consulting in the amount of \$548,000 for monitoring and documenting removal and disposal of this additional storm debris.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to approve the additional funding for Thompson Consulting in the amount of \$548,000 for monitoring and documenting removal and disposal of this additional storm debris.

Consideration of a request to authorize the extension of the deadline for credit for the Harvest Station Project.

Tim Tanner, City Attorney, stated that this request was to authorize the extension of the deadline for credit for the Harvest Station Project from July 1, 2023 to July 1, 2024. In reviewing the Intergovernmental Agreement passed back May of 2023, we had already accounted for that so there is no need at this time to consider this request. Tim Tanner asked that this request be laid on the table. He spoke with the individuals at IDP yesterday about this Project and they anticipate to close on the construction financing by Thanksgiving or the end of the year. After that, they will have the construction financing in place and hopefully, we will see something go up after that. Councilman Carroll inquired as to how the motion should be worded. Tim Tanner stated that it should be a motion to lay the request on the table. They may come back because this is one item of seven things. If they need us to do anything else, we will consider it at that time. This way we will have an option to pull it off the table.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman McIntyre, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to set aside the Agenda Item to authorize the extension of the deadline for credit for the Harvest Station Project.

## CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Delma Sikes stated that she lives in District 1 and on July 10, 2023, she received a notice about the bridge road on Lake Park Road being taken out. They tore up the bridge on July 10, 2023 and they did not see anybody for another two weeks. Then there was a big crane there that stayed for approximately 30 minutes. Then they did not see anyone else. They would come down there and stay for an hour or less and then go back. She wanted to know how much time they spent down there because she did not think they even spent a day. Her driveway is 126 steps to the road and she goes down there three or four times a day checking to see if they are working. If she cannot see that well she will get in her car and go around to the other side. They have not done anything. She has been there for 54 years and she has a vested interest in the neighborhood. She would like for somebody to tell them when they plan to complete the Project. Rountree Construction is not doing their job and they are sick and tired of them giving excuses. When you call up they cannot measure the pipes right or the weather is bad. They are not talking about the Brooklyn Bridge but a two-lane road. They do not understand why they cannot get this done. They want to know what is going on and when they plan to finish the bridge. They have to go out of the way to get to other places. It is disrespectful to their neighborhood. They keep their neighborhood clean and the crime down.

Issa Hart stated that they told them the bridge work would be ready by the 15<sup>th</sup> and it was not completed. This has been going on for a while and now they are being told that it might be December before they finish it. He has lived in that neighborhood since 1977.

Louis Gordon, 2 Shanna Circle, stated that the last time he approached Council he spoke about abandoned buildings in neighborhoods. He did a little research and is focusing on the homes located on North Troup Street and Gordon Street in the neighborhood by LAMP. The issue is that there are a large number of homes that have been abandoned and neglected in these neighborhoods. Even if you go back to Vallotton Drive, there are homes that he has never seen anyone in there. They have always been abandoned and boarded up. It is a fact that your environment helps to dictate the behaviors of your neighborhood. The better your neighborhood looks then it is less likely that you will have certain types of crimes and negative behaviors. When you look at Troup Street, there have been more negative activities going on in Tom's Corner Park. A part of that can be attributed to the lack of attention given to these neighborhoods. He understands that all of these properties are owned by different people, but we as taxpayers are held to standards as to how we keep the property we own. We should be doing the same for those properties. It is not surprising that a lot of the same people own these neglected properties. He would like to find a solution to these abandoned properties and hold people accountable who buy these abandoned properties and rent them out. We should do better about increasing the quality of living that we are offering to citizens in those neighborhoods. He does a lot of mentorship in that area and a lot of the kids need better homes to grow up in and better examples of what it looks like when the City cares about where they lay their heads.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that the couple who just spoke before the Council did not think that sticking around would serve a purpose. He figured they were leaving so he caught them and they came back. Sometimes we make policies at Council Meetings and it is not so conducive to the citizens. There are other people who have the same problem that they do. He goes across the State of Georgia and when a citizen stands to talk like he is now, the newspaper in most all of those cities take the Citizens to be Heard issues and publish them in the newspaper. That means that people who live in those cities know the problems that other citizens are having. It broadens the respect of our government and it proves that Georgia is an open government. Just imagine how many other people feel like this couple. They will not get to hear the problem because it wasn't done publicly. That is why he wishes that someone could be elected on City Council that will understand that citizens want to be listened to when they bring up complaints. He goes to other cities in the State and he is controversial; however, he gets things done.

Bill Love, 2207 Azalea Drive, stated that he has been through the storm and his house was damaged. He wanted to bring something up to the City Council. The permit system during a storm like this should be considered. He had to pay \$75 to get a new meter put on his house. He then had to come back and get it inspected so he paid another \$10. That did not include the installation of the meter. He also had some roof damage so he has \$110 in another permit. He has paid almost \$300 in permits for one dwelling. Since these are special times, the City should make the permits \$10. We need the permits to track and make sure the work is done properly, but during times like that we need to give the citizens a break. If it is storm damage, the City should make the permit fee \$10 and give the citizens a break.

John Robinson, 3227 San Juline Circle, Lake Park, stated that several of you have heard from Deon Lyons



with the Department of Justice pertaining to the issues that he has been discussing. He would like to arrange meetings with Council and he hopes that Council understands they mean business about what they are trying to take steps to do. Our community has been neglected and abandoned by the Council and the City. There has been a great injustice here in the City when it comes to the black community and the lower income community. They would like to set up a meeting where it sets the stage for mediation and they want to bring in all parties together such as The People's Tribunal and the Associate Pastor at the First Antioch Missionary Baptist Church. They are going to be discussing issues pertaining to the 1% sales tax that can support the community and some of the programs. For example, Barack Obama Boulevard is scheduled for a center lane to be put in and the 1% sales tax raised \$30 million. Out of that \$30 million, \$14 million will be spent on construction of that street. They believe that the 1% sales tax can be accumulated in ten years for the welfare of the community, upgrade/upkeep, and restoration for Revolving Loan Funds. They can no longer stand by and allow our City to take the stance that it has been taking over these years. It has been 163 years and they have never had a black elected Mayor. They just got the first black City Manager. It is time for change and they are looking forward to change. They are talking litigation and they are trying to find deterrents to litigation. Mr. Lyons is going to be a tremendous help to them and they are looking forward to making some progress. They hope that they will not have to go to Federal Court but if they cannot get any place, they will go to the Federal Court. They will try to overturn every stone that might lead to misappropriation of Federal Funds. They want to try to avoid all that and keep from paying taxpayers' dollars.

## **CITY MANAGER'S REPORT**

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that the Winnersville Classic will be held tomorrow and citizens are encouraged to dress up in their favorite team attire. The Valdosta Main Street Costume Crawl will be held October 6, 2023 at 5:30 p.m. The Main Street will play music at Unity Park followed by a Costume Contest at 7:30 p.m. Citizens are encouraged to participate. The Valdosta Police Department Faith and Blue Event will be held on Saturday, October 7, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Saunders Park. Fire Prevention Week is scheduled for October 8-14, 2023 and there will be activities which include station tours, fire engine tours, and educational videos. The theme is Cooking Safety Starts with You.

## **COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Mayor Matheson stated that one of his favorite things over the past four years is that immediately following the Council Meeting is to help the citizens who speak under the Citizens to be Heard portion of the Council Meeting. He appreciated Mr. Rhynes going to get that couple and bring them back. He loves to watch good government in action and a responsive government. He likes to see the City Manager, Assistant City Manager, and Department Heads speak to the citizens who have issues and complaints. They are getting an immediate response and face time. Mayor Matheson also stated that a letter was sent to him from CJB Industries which was addressed to the Mayor and Council and it read as follows: "Valdosta's leadership is awesome. You and many emergency coordinators prepared our community for safety in the storm. It has been an amazing quick recovery while continuing to keep us informed throughout the cleanup. Please thank everyone on behalf of CJB Industries." Mayor Matheson stated that Valdosta State University Blazer Football team is playing Delta State who is the cream of the crop in the Gulf South Conference this year. This will be a big test and will start at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday at Bazemore-Hyder Stadium.

Councilman Carroll stated, "Go Cats!"

Councilman Howard stated that as you can see, it is expensive to run the City so when you see Council and leadership asking for citizens to vote for SPLOST, that is what it is for. It costs money for big trucks and Police vehicles and without that, we would not have the opportunity to talk about rolling back the millage rate. It would go up. He asked that citizens support the SPLOST Referendum so that we are able to continue to do the things we do for the City without raising property taxes. Councilman Howard also stated that we are still in cleanup mode from the storm. He would like for the citizens to understand. He does not want them to give up their power. There is nothing that anyone sitting up here can do. He thinks that everyone sitting up here was without electricity. No elected official can call and get their power on any faster than anyone else. All those companies that came from different states did not know what side of town they were working on. They were all here to clear lines in order to get the power restored. We need to be mindful because there were some people who were displaced from their homes. Some still do not have a place to go. We should be thankful that we did not have more tragedies than what we did in our community. It is going to be rough go and that is why it is called a natural disaster. With the

leadership and help from people in our community, we are going to get it together. He would like for everyone to be kind and mindful of your words because you do not know when you might push someone over the edge.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that she is happy to see the citizens coming to the Council Meeting. She heard some of the citizens saying the same thing that they have heard at other Council Meetings about the City being a little more lenient about the charges during a disaster. They are hearing what the citizens say and maybe it will be a possibility. That is what they want. If citizens will talk to the Council and work together they can make our City better. They need to hear from the citizens. She thanked the citizens for coming. Also, the abandoned housing in the City is an issue that they have been working on for years and years. Accountability is a way to stop some of this and she asked that citizens continue to come to the Council Meetings. They will get something done.

Councilman Gibbs stated that he appreciated the Department Heads and the work they do behind the scenes with the disposal of all the debris and working with FEMA and GEMA, He is not frustrated with the Public Works Director because it is a lot of work. At the end of the day, we are having to handle all the headaches of getting rid of all this stuff with the possibility of someone else saying they appreciate us making the bread and now he gets to eat it and we don't. He would like for citizens to know that our Department Heads are doing a great job and the frustration in his tone is not with them but with the process with FEMA and GEMA and what goes on behind the scenes. He knows that it is out of our hands and it is frustrating to deal with. Councilman Gibbs encouraged them to keep doing a great job.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that we give these bids to the contractors and it is like they sign off and do a small section and then they leave. The senior citizens that live in that area have one way that they go to church and the grocery store. The school kids have been walking through the canal since the first day of school. That is so unfair that they as Council Members and Department Heads allow these contractors to bid on these jobs and they make excuses about ordering parts in or bad weather. This was started before we had the hurricane come through. We still have the same problem now. They are churches down there, a park down there, and the kids have to walk all the way around just to get to where they need to go. It is unsafe and at night, she has heard that people are taking their cars and riding on that location. If they get injured, they will want to come back and sue the City. They also had two incidents where citizens ran into the stones down there and the Police had to be called. Now they have made a track around the church parking area and are moving the barriers. We need to do something about that problem. Kids are curious and with the blocks and asphalt stacked up taller than her, it is unsafe for the children and the senior citizens.

## **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 October 5, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:48 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, October 19, 2023.

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City Clerk, City of Valdosta

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Mayor, City of Valdosta