

**MINUTES**  
**MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL**  
**5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 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, Tim Carroll, Ben Norton, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilwoman Sandra Tooley was absent. The invocation was given by Councilman Tim Carroll, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the Special Called Meeting of September 7, 2023 and the Regular Meeting of September 21, 2023 were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council. The Minutes of the October 5, 2023 Regular Meeting are forthcoming.

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

Consideration of a request to purchase an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) upgrade for the City of Valdosta Crime Laboratory.

Police Chief Leslie Manahan stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes Regional Crime Laboratory uses the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) database, which is maintained by the Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI). This database is used for criminal investigations to compare fingerprints recovered from crime scenes and/or evidence, to identify possible offenders. The GBI implements the software needed for outside agencies to communicate with the AFIS database. The current AFIS hardware and software, which is through the NEC Corporation of America, has been in place since 2010. This equipment and software have both reached the end of their life. The NEC Corporation of America has made an upgrade to the system and in order to continue to have access to the State and FBI system, the crime laboratory must make the upgrade to their AFIS terminal. Any agency that uses the AFIS system must use the system from NEC Corporation of America, which is mandated by the GBI. On September 28, 2023, the GBI sent a letter to the Crime Laboratory that this upgrade must be purchased by December 1, 2023. The Crime Laboratory received a quote from NEC Corporation of America in the amount of \$44,600, which includes hardware, software, shipping, installation, training, and a one-year warranty. The Crime Laboratory currently has the NEC Maintenance Agreement in the current Fiscal Year Budget in the amount of \$7,270 and a Hydrogen Sensor in the current Fiscal Year Budget (Item CP24.19) in the amount of \$5,200 which they do not need at this time. This is a total of \$12,470 from FY24. The remaining amount of \$32,130 will come from current revenue. Chief Manahan recommended that Council approve the purchase of the NEC Corporation of America for the AFIS upgrade in the amount of \$44,600.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Norton, seconded by Councilman McIntyre, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the purchase an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) upgrade from the NEC Corporation of America in the amount of \$44,600 for the City of Valdosta Crime Laboratory.

Consideration of a request to purchase new Body Armor for the Tactical Operations Unit (TOU) at the Valdosta Police Department.

Police Chief Leslie Manahan stated that the members of the Tactical Operations Unit (TOU) respond to high risk situations such as armed/barricaded subjects, high risk warrant service, active shooter situations, or any other situation that requires specially equipped and highly trained/skilled personnel. Due to the types of situations that members of TOU are asked to respond for, they require a higher level of protective gear. Their current body armor, which includes level III vests, abdominal armor, and shoulder armor, were purchased in 2018. The armor has a five-year warranty and they will expire this year. When the armor expires, the team will not meet the regulations set by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), which govern safety equipment for law enforcement. The Police Department received three quotes which outfit 15 team members: (1) HYPER XFULL in the amount of \$90,187.50, (2) Safariland in the amount of \$53,257.50, and (3) Verco Materials, LLC in the amount of \$51,181.50.

Council approved \$62,000 in the FY24 Budget to replace the TOU gear. Chief Manahan recommended that Council approve the purchase of new Body Armor from Verco Materials, LLC in the amount of \$51,181.50 for the Tactical Operations Unit (TOU) at the Valdosta Police Department.

**A MOTION** by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the purchase of new Body Armor from Verco Materials, LLC in the amount of \$51,181.50 for the Tactical Operations Unit (TOU) at the Valdosta Police Department.

Consideration of a request to approve a Proposal and Consulting Contract for services to perform a Historic Resource Survey of the Southside area of the City of Valdosta.

Jeff Brammer, Special Projects/Historic Preservation Planner, stated that over the past few years, the Valdosta Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and City Staff have completed the required periodic re-survey of the Local Historic District in order to maintain the City's "Certified Local Government (CLG)" status from the State of Georgia for historic preservation. Other purposes of this survey include the gathering of data to enhance the HPC's decision-making capacity, advancing the City's long-range planning initiatives for this area, and updating the State's historic resources database. This re-survey involved approximately 2,000 parcels of land and was performed in two (2) phases, utilizing Grant assistance from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), City matching funds, and local in-kind services. These first two phases have been envisioned as part of a broader scope to include future phases that analyze and update survey data for our National Register (NRHP) Districts which are located outside the Local Historic District, as well as other neighborhood areas adjacent to the Local Historic District. Phase 3 was identified as the area to the south of the Local Historic District which encompasses the "Southside" NRHP District and would include more than 1,100 parcels of land. In February of 2023, the City once again applied for DCA Grant funding to assist with the Phase 3 Project and later budgeted the necessary funds to cover the City's matching costs. In April of 2023, City Council adopted a Resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute the necessary Grant Agreement with DCA in the event that the Grant is approved. In July of 2023, the City of Valdosta received official notice of the approved Grant award from DCA in the amount of \$25,000. On September 5, 2023, the City issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the historic resources survey of the Southside area of Valdosta to include approximately 1,123 parcels. On September 28, 2023, the City received one (1) competitive sealed proposal from a qualified Historic Preservation consulting firm. On October 2, 2023, the HPC gathered to review and evaluate the submitted proposal, and to make their selection of a qualified consultant. The HPC voted unanimously to select TerraXplorations, Inc. at a cost of \$50,038. In addition to providing a basis for using legal and financial tools to protect and enhance historic resources, this next survey will address two specific local needs. First, to update obsolete historic resource data stemming from a county-wide survey that was done in 2004 and the Southside NRHP survey that was done in 2006, and second, to gather important data to facilitate discussion about a possible expansion of the Local Historic District to include a historic portion of the Southside area. Jeff Brammer, Special Projects/Historic Preservation Planner, recommended that Council approve the selection of the submitted proposal and authorize the Mayor to execute a Contract for services to perform the historic resource survey of the Southside area of Valdosta.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Howard, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve a Proposal and Consulting Contract with TerraXplorations, Inc. in the amount of \$50,038 for services to perform a Historic Resource Survey of the Southside area of the City of Valdosta.

Consideration of an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority and Commitment Letter to the EDA for Infrastructure Improvements for a new Walmart Manufacturing Project.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority has been working with the City and the County on Project Forge. The multi-national retailer Walmart will establish a new food processing (dairy) facility in Lowndes County. This dairy facility will create almost 400 new jobs and \$350 million in investment in Lowndes County. They will make a large investment in the community and bring several well-paying jobs. In order to bring this Project to Lowndes County, there are needed infrastructure improvements that will have to be made in the way of water and sewer improvements and new infrastructure. The Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority will apply for an EDA Grant from the U.S. Department of Economic Development to cover the costs of the installation of the water, wastewater, and elevated tank improvements (the "Improvements"). The Improvements, together with the engineering and other general condition costs associated

with the installation of the Improvements, is the "Improvement Costs." The total estimated Project cost as provided by Turnipseed Engineering is \$10,771,230 which includes engineering. The total EDA eligible cost, which includes construction, contingency, and Grant administration, is estimated to be \$9,650,630.00. The Industrial Authority will ask EDA to fund 50% of the Project cost which is \$4,825,315.00. The City of Valdosta has agreed to contribute \$6,000,000. Included in the City's commitment is \$4,825,315.00 to serve as the Grant match. The City will need to sign a Commitment Letter for \$4,825,315.00. The City's portion of this Project will be funded by the issuance of debt with debt service thereon to be provided by increased Project User Fees (utility bill) resulting from the completion of the Project. All improvements, once installed, inspected, and accepted by the City and all future maintenance of the Infrastructure Improvements will be the sole responsibility of the City. The City will have the right to charge its standard or other rates imposed by it for the use by the various City and/or County future users of the Infrastructure Improvements, including but not limited to the Project. The design and installation of the Infrastructure Improvements will be obtained through the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority. The Industrial Authority, through the assistance of the Engineers, will cause the Infrastructure Improvements to be designed, bid, and installed all in accordance with well recognized State, City, and Governmental Standards. An Intergovernmental Agreement between the City of Valdosta and the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority has been prepared which outlines the Infrastructure Improvements for the new development. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the Intergovernmental Agreement between the City of Valdosta and the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority for Infrastructure Improvements for the Walmart Manufacturing Project and the Commitment Letter to the EDA.

**A MOTION** by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman McIntyre, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve an Intergovernmental Agreement with the Valdosta-Lowndes County Industrial Authority and Commitment Letter to the EDA for Infrastructure Improvements for a new Walmart Manufacturing Project.

Consideration of an Agreement for Governmental Affairs Representation for the City of Valdosta.

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that Coleman Talley Strategies LLC (CTS) serves as a governmental affairs consultant and provides representation for municipalities and counties in the State of Georgia. The overall scope of their work is to collaborate in the development of governmental affairs strategies for the State of Georgia and for the Georgia Congressional Delegation. John Crawford is the Principal Consultant at Coleman Talley Strategies LLC (CTS) and will manage the delivery of all services to the City of Valdosta. John is a recognized government affairs professional with more than 20 years of experience. He is a skilled relationship builder with a track record of delivering results. Staff of Coleman Talley Strategies LLC consists of the following: Penny Spencer, Administrative Assistant Government Affairs with over 20 years of experience in State public policy and government relations, ethics compliance with State, local public officials/employees, and private entities, tracking legislation, preparation of organizational and formation documents, database management, and client billing. Gabrielle Metts, Marketing Professional with eight (8) years of experience in digital marketing, digital design, event planning, and client relation. Coleman Talley Strategies LLC continues to build relationships with key legislative and executive leadership, and they will work with the City of Valdosta to implement a public policy agenda and communicate directly with members of the General Assembly, Governor Brian Kemp and Staff, and various State agencies and others as appropriate to advocate for policies that best serve the City of Valdosta. Coleman Talley Strategies LLC will develop a well-planned strategy to educate and influence the opinions of government leaders. The proposed monthly fee will be \$4,000 (see attached Agreement). The term of the Agreement will run from November 1, 2023 through October 31, 2024 and either party may terminate the Agreement without cause by a 30-day notice. Richard Hardy, City Manager, recommended that Council approve the Agreement with Coleman Talley Strategies LLC for Governmental Affairs Representation for the City of Valdosta.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve an Agreement with Coleman Talley Strategies LLC for Governmental Affairs Representation for the City of Valdosta.

## LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to donate property located at 237 1/2 Wisenbaker Lane to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority.

Anetra Riley, Neighborhood Development/Community Protection Manager, stated that the City of Valdosta owns 237 1/2 Wisenbaker Lane and the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority owns 303 Wisenbaker Lane. Carolyn Williams contacted Eric Williams, Executive Director of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority, inquiring about purchasing properties located at 237 1/2 Wisenbaker and 303 Wisenbaker Lane. Carolyn Williams owns 203, 236, and 305 Wisenbaker Lane. Anetra Riley, Neighborhood Development/Community Protection Manager, recommended that Council approve the request to donate property located at 237 1/2 Wisenbaker Lane to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority so that the Land Bank can sell 237 1/2 Wisenbaker Lane to Carolyn Williams to get the parcel back on the tax roll.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the request to donate property located at 237 1/2 Wisenbaker Lane to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Land Bank Authority.

### **CITIZENS TO BE HEARD**

Von Shipman, 3312 Brittan Drive, stated that he had a good experience today with the Engineering Department. Some of his neighbors call him when they have things that need to be checked out. He spoke with Angela Bray and everything is looking good on the situation. He also thanked Council for their leadership during the storm preparation and recovery and the City Staff who worked so hard to bring our City back to normal or as close as possible. Mr. Shipman stated that he really wanted to reflect because 20 years ago today, they opened the Traffic Management Center (TMC). That was quite a big step because we were only one of a few TMC's in the State at that time. Mayor Jimmy Rainwater and the Council had foresight and supported them as they made the decision to move forward with that. Mayor Rainwater passed away right before it was opened so he never got to see it. Mr. Shipman stated that he was proud of the City Staff for taking that infancy of a Project and to grow it. He retired in 2010 and it has continued to improve. He is very thankful for Council's support of long-range Projects. They all see that the traffic flow, along with technology, has allowed us to get to places better, faster, and more efficiently while accidents continue to decline with the excellent work of the Police Department. It was a good day 20 years ago and it is a good day today.

Anthony Fudge, 2104 Pin Oak Circle, stated that his house flooded during the hurricane and that was the third time his house has flooded. He lives right next to a trench that the water tries to flow through. When he came here the last time, the Engineer told him that there was something in place regarding a retention pond near the Fire Station on Park Avenue in the next fiscal year. The other day, a couple of guys came from the City to clean it up a little bit and they had tractors and saws; however, they packed up two minutes later and left. He called the City and spoke with a young lady and she said they left because she told them to. They had to finish something else they didn't finish the day before. Every little bit over there helps. He asked her about the retention pond and she stated that it would probably be two years from now. It is really needed there. His house had 20 inches of water inside and his next door neighbor did not have a drop and they share a fence.

John Robinson, 3227 San Juline Circle, Lake Park, stated that he saw where Council voted in tonight the Agreement for Historic Preservation. It is kind of like throwing out the bath water before you bathe the child. It took approximately 40 years to recognize that you really don't know what is taking place in the City with impoverished people. It is time for some major changes. They met with the Department of Transportation (DOT) this afternoon and they discussed some issues related to the St. Augustine Road Project. No one seemed to recognize the harm that had been done to the City and to the people of the City. They are looking to move forward with the things that they have been discussing with Council and they are looking forward to making it very progressive. They want to be aggressive in what they are doing. They also discussed TSPLOST with the DOT and they want to get TSPLOST on the ballot here so that if you can build a bridge that costs \$75-\$80 million, then why could you not use TSPLOST to sustain a community. Once the James Beck Overpass was built in 1981, it destroyed the community. They are asking that TSPLOST be put on the ballot here for revitalization and support programs such as the Revolving Loan Funds and training facilities to teach people trades. They realize it is going to take time. Taxpayers would be putting money in but they would be getting something back out of it instead of just pavement and sidewalks. People are suffering from a lack of food. There was a line of cars when Councilwoman Tooley was distributing food on Wednesday. That is a signal that something is very wrong here. There are too many people in line to get food. He feels that TSPLOST can help change it.

Darren Neal, President of the NAACP, 1587 Baytree Road, stated that there is an issue that has been spoken about over the past several months. There is construction that has occurred south of Fry Street and Hudson Docket just on the other side of Pinevale. Without any shadow of a doubt, it is a major situation in which emergency vehicles cannot arrive in that particular section of town. Both sides are blocked off and construction has not occurred in that spot in a long time. They started July 10, 2023 and here we are approaching November. What should have been the basic reformation of a bridge has turned into a Project that is at a complete standstill. There is no way for EMS to get in and the people cannot go to Church in that area. It is an age old rhetorical situation where the black community is completely underserved. They are here to gain some attention in that area and hope that someone will focus on the construction of the bridge. They would like to know why it is still standing still. The City has private contractors that bid on those jobs and are at their mercy depending upon whether they decide to get the work done. It is time for the City to talk to whoever is in charge of Engineering and that Project and get it moving. This would not have sat still in other neighborhoods. It is so disturbing to him to see the same backhoe and grater that are sitting in the middle of the road and have not been touched. He coaches football in that area and he goes over there every day and checks the backhoe and it is still sitting there. It has been sitting there for weeks and months. There is no traffic that can flow through and no one can get in or out. He cannot see why it takes this much outcry for someone to finally say that we are still fighting in the black community for sidewalks, streetlights, and basic necessities that every other neighborhood has. He has had this conversation before with the Mayor. The spending of \$250 million in the white community and wealthy communities and less than \$2 million spent in the black community. Year after year, the deficit has been created by the misspending. We need to fix this.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that he talked about how we treat citizens at the last meeting. He travels throughout the State of Georgia and some cities have been fined \$45,000 for not being consistent in how citizens address the Council. At the last Meeting, someone on Council referred that they disagreed with him. He has no problem with that; however, he can assure you that it is indeed a disgrace in his humble opinion for a citizen to stand before you and not be listened to by you and you cannot respond to them until after they take a seat. Then you come back and make comments about a citizen and that citizen is not given an opportunity to respond to you. That is disrespectful. You should not do your own children that way. Council can change the law because he has been in other cities and it does not operate like that. He also noticed in the last Council Meeting that someone added two Minutes to his time and no one said anything. In his opinion, you are giving up your power as he has seen done in other cities. There is no way that some of those Council Members in other cities where the Mayor would ask if he could have a motion to give him two minutes and you all would approve it or some of you don't agree with it and you won't vote for it. In some cases, it is just not granted. He loves our form of government and he does not like dictatorial type governments. He is not going to finish tonight but he will be back to finish. When the people came from out of town and volunteered to help Valdosta, they were at Scott Park and he interviewed them while they were working to help us. They could not even use the bathroom. He told them that he has stood before the Mayor and Council, and the bathroom was not opened for those people. He was so saddened. He wanted to post the interviews on-line but it would have been too embarrassing. He is not going to post it but he could have. He just wanted to say to the Council do not give away all of your power. Stand up and be heard because that is why we voted you in office to say something and not just be a stone man.

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

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that there will be a Love Your River Cleanup tomorrow with Lowndes County to clean up Sugar Creek and One Mile Branch. The meeting location is Drexel Park from 8:00 a.m. until noon. On Thursday, October 26, 2023, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., City Staff will be reading to students at W. G. Nunn Elementary and J. L. Lomax Elementary Schools. Also, on that same day, the City will host the Fourth Annual Festifall from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Unity Park. Citizens are encouraged to bring their families to this event. On Friday, October 27, 2023, there will be a Witches Night Out at 5:30 p.m. and merchants will be offering a variety of incentives with punch cards. On Thursday, November 2, 2023, there will be Coffee and Conversations with the City Managers from 7:45 a.m. to 9:15 a.m. at Just Love Coffee, which is located at 1733 Gornto Road, Suite 101-C.

### **COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Councilman Howard stated that every Council Meeting, they approve a lot of money for equipment for our City to be able to do the jobs that they do. Our citizens ask for simple things like a sign that says, "Slow Down,

Children at Play” and we are telling them no. We are doing a disservice to them and to us when we do not provide them with simple things like that. We cannot be on all of those streets and the citizens are calling us and asking us for those things. We then relay it to the people who can make the decision. People do not want to hear that signs don’t work. They want to see a sign put up. They want to see a “No Littering” sign put up. We have the signs so we need to put them up. People also ask for speed bumps and nothing major. Until we start listening to the citizens, maybe some of these people need to ride around with no air conditioning. Let’s not approve all this stuff. We have to start listening to the people who put us in these seats.

Councilman McIntyre stated that before he was elected, one of the main requests he had was about the speeds in the neighborhoods. The thing about the speeding is that the speed limits are not regulated by the City. One says it is 35, then it is 35. Our streets are very dynamic with the people who live there. For instance, on one street in District 3, a young lady moved in with four kids under ten years old. Directly across from her, another young lady moved in with three kids all under ten years old. There are seven kids playing on the small street. He wanted to see if he could drive 35 miles per hour down the street. He could not even get to 30 in good conscious. We have temporary speed bumps that cost \$250 each that we could put down in places. When they wear down and the conditions changes, we don’t put the speed bumps back down. The other problem that he has noticed is with the calculations we use for determining how fast the cars are going. You have to have a certain number of vehicles traveling at a certain amount of speed that goes over the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile. If you calculate all the time in a 24 hour period, most of those hours have no cars. If you factor that into an average to get a mean, it sullies the waters and this is why 95% of all the tests pass. We need to take another look at how we determine whether or not they are speeding. Not to mention, the average person knows that those two little strips in the street are for speeding and they slow down. He agrees with Councilman Howard that this is low hanging fruit. He has had citizens that have gone door-to-door to get signatures, get it notarized, and turn it in. He is trying to follow the rules but here we are months down the line and no response. The citizens are getting very frustrated when he tells them this is the process you have to follow in order to get speed bumps in their community. They follow the process, come to him and he turns it in, and then he does not get a response and they don’t either. That’s another whole layer of the problem with speeding. He would like for the Mayor and Council to take speeding very seriously.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she is not the best cook but was cooking today and the fire alarm went off. She forgot the pass code and could not stop it. She had tried to stop the Fire Department but they still came. She called ADT and they tried to stop the Fire Department but they still came. They did a good job and the Firemen were on point for coming to put the fire out at her house for someone who cannot cook.

## ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Norton, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the October 19, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:18 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, November 9, 2023.

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City Clerk, City of Valdosta

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Mayor, City of Valdosta