

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2024
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: Eric Howard, Sandra Tooley, Andy Gibbs, Tim Carroll, and Nick Harden. Councilman Thomas McIntyre and Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody were 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 Regular Meeting held on November 7, 2024 were approved by unanimous consent (5-0 Vote).

PUBLIC HEARINGS

A REQUEST TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY (MAIDEN ALLEY AND WALL STREET) BETWEEN SOUTH TOOMBS STREET TO WEST HILL AVENUE

Consideration of a request to close the public right-of-way (Maiden Alley and Wall Street) between South Toombs Street to West Hill Avenue.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that the Engineering Department received a request from IDP South Patterson, LLC requesting that the City close and vacate the public right-of-way between South Toombs Street to West Hill Avenue to facilitate Downtown commercial development. Older records indicate the names of these rights-of-way are named Maiden Alley and Wall Street. The initial request was received from Mr. Daniel Bayman, the representative partner of Valdosta Investment Partners, LLP, which owns 100% of the adjacent parcels. These rights-of-way bisect the block containing the old Bank of America building, and IDP South Patterson, LLC is requesting that they be abandoned by the City Council into the ownership of Valdosta Investment Partners, LLP. The sewer in place does not appear to serve any use in the Patterson Street direction and, as such, the ownership of the sewer can be released by the City to the property owner. The only other known utility housed within the subject alley is Georgia Power for whom the applicant is coordinating the dedication of re-configured private easements in conjunction with a development proposal. Our conventional process is to send certified mailings to all adjacent/affected property owners/residents; however, given that the applicant is the representative partner of an entity which owns 100% of adjacent parcels, our Ordinance requirements for the adjoining owner agreement have been satisfied. This request has been distributed to City Departments and no comments or objections have been received. A Public Notice of the request was circulated in the Valdosta Daily Times on November 8, 2024 and November 9, 2024. A certified notification letter was mailed to one property owner abutting the applicant's property on November 1, 2024. Public Hearing Notice signs were posted at both ends of the portion of Maiden Alley and Wall Street on November 11, 2024. All of the procedures and requirements of City Ordinance No. 2023-12 have been satisfied. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the closure of the described sections of the public right-of-way between South Toombs Street and West Hill Avenue with the condition that either access to or relocation of the existing electrical service line will be provided to the satisfaction of Georgia Power Company.

Daniel Bayman, Valdosta Investment Partners, 106 South Patterson Street, spoke in favor of the request. He will be glad to answer any questions Council may have. As stated, Valdosta Investment Partners purchased this property in March, 2024. They would like to do a development on the property but where the sewer line currently lays is too close to where they want to develop. They are going to have to move the sewer line anyway so it is their intention, as part of that development, to relocate the current sewer line.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

A **MOTION** by Councilwoman Tooley, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the request to close the public right-of-way (Maiden Alley and Wall Street) between South Toombs Street to West Hill Avenue.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-17, A RESOLUTION TO ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH THE GEORGIA INTERLOCAL RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY (GIRMA) TO PROVIDE COVERAGE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS AS REQUIRED BY HOUSE BILL 451

Consideration of a Resolution to enter into an Agreement with the Georgia Interlocal Risk Management Agency (GIRMA) to provide coverage for First Responders as required by House Bill 451.

Jennie Boyer, Human Resources Director, stated that House Bill 451 mandates that all public entities that have employed or volunteer first responders to provide lump-sum and income replacement (long-term disability) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) benefits as of January 1, 2025. The City of Valdosta has received a premium quote from Georgia Interlocal Risk Management Agency (GIRMA) in the amount of \$30,488 for the 2025 calendar year to be paid in two semi-annual amounts. Acceptance of this quote would enroll the City of Valdosta in the GMA-GIRMA First Responder Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Program and meet our obligations under HB 451. A Resolution has been prepared in order to add the City of Valdosta as a member in an additional GIRMA fund for the First Responder Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Program. Jennie Boyer, Human Resources Director, recommended that Council approve the Resolution authorizing the City to enter into an agreement with GIRMA to participate in the First Responder Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Program

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Harden, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to enact Resolution No. 2024-17, a Resolution to enter into an Agreement with the Georgia Interlocal Risk Management Agency (GIRMA) to provide coverage for First Responders as required by House Bill 451, the complete text of which will be found in Resolution Book VII.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for the purchase of a Non-CDL Vacuum Jet Sewer Truck for the City of Valdosta Utilities Department (Bid No. 14-24-25).

Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, stated that the Valdosta Utilities Department needs to purchase a Non-CDL Sewer Truck. This vehicle will provide the necessary suction and water pressure required for wastewater utility maintenance and will expand labor resources by not requiring a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) to operate. This vehicle is a Council-approved Budget item for this Fiscal Year. Sealed bids were received on October 17, 2024 with the low bid meeting specifications submitted by Adams Equipment in the amount of \$398,968. Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the low bid meeting specifications submitted by Adams Equipment in the amount of \$398,968 and allow the Utilities Department to proceed with the purchase.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Howard, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the low bid meeting specifications submitted by Adams Equipment in the amount of \$398,968 and allow the Utilities Department to proceed with the purchase of a Non-CDL Vacuum Jet Sewer Truck for the City of Valdosta Utilities Department.

Consideration of a request to purchase a new decanter unit for installation at the Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, stated that the decanter in Sequential Batch Reactor (SBR4) was originally installed during the Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant construction and placed in operation in May of 2016. The decanter is a critical component of the treatment process in each of the Plant’s four SBR tanks (treatment tanks). Without a properly functioning decanter, the Plant’s Staff is forced to take that SBR out of service. This decreases Plant treatment capacity and can lower the quality of effluent discharged to the

Withlacoochee River, especially during high Plant flow periods. Currently, the decanter in SBR4 is not closing properly and solids spill into the decanter housing during the mixing and aeration cycles of the treatment process. The Utilities Staff found out in 2022 that this decanter model is no longer being manufactured and has limited spare parts available, as well as limited technical support from the manufacturer. This decanter unit in SBR4 needs to be replaced with the same model that was engineered, manufactured, and recently installed in SBR1. The decanter units are manufactured and sold by Aqua-Aerobic Systems, Inc., the exclusive manufacturer and sole provider of this equipment. Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the sole source bid submitted by Aqua-Aerobic Systems in the amount of \$97,860 and allow the Utilities Department to proceed with the purchase of the new decanter.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the sole source bid submitted by Aqua-Aerobic Systems in the amount of \$97,860 and allow the Utilities Department to proceed with the purchase of the new decanter unit for installation at the Withlacoochee Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Consideration of a request to approve a Proposal for Design and Engineering Services for electrical and control rehabilitation at Wells No. 1 and No. 5.

Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, stated that the City of Valdosta has provided on-going improvements to the wellfield which was originally constructed in 1991 and has been in operation since that time. The electrical equipment at Wells No. 1 and No. 5 have reached the end of their useful life and the City of Valdosta desires to improve the operations and control for these wells. The work to be performed includes the replacement of the existing electrical and control components, replacement of the incoming service, all necessary electrical work, and coordination with Georgia Power. Staff requested a Proposal from the Engineer of record, CDM Smith, for those services. On October 23, 2024, CDM Smith submitted a Proposal in the amount of \$119,495. Because CDM Smith provided similar services on past projects (Well Nos. 4, 6, and 7), the Utilities Department personnel determined CDM Smith is the most logical and best option to provide these services for the rehabilitation of electrical and control components at Wells No. 1 and 5, similarly to the previous three wells in the wellfield. Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the Proposal submitted by CDM Smith, Inc. in the amount of \$119,495 for replacement of equipment at Wells No. 1 and No. 5.

A MOTION by Councilman Howard, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the Proposal for Design and Engineering Services submitted by CDM Smith, Inc. in the amount of \$119,495 for electrical and control rehabilitation at Wells No. 1 and No. 5.

Consideration of bids for an emergency pipe repair on Ravenwood Drive.

Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, stated that the existing 30" corrugated metal drainage pipe collapsed at 1121 Ravenwood Drive in October of 2024. Due to the critical impact on infrastructure and property located outside the easement, City Stormwater Division Staff solicited quotes for an emergency repair. The option to remove and replace the pipe is not feasible; therefore, our only alternative is cured-in-place, which involves inserting a flexible liner into the existing pipe to create a new pipe. Due to the emergency and property damages, a bid was received on October 31, 2024 from Southeast Pipe Survey, Inc. in the amount of \$61,275. This company is the only one in our region that can do cured-in-place pipes. Given that the costs for these emergency repairs exceed the Purchasing Policy threshold for City Manager approval, City Council is required for approval. Jason Barnes, Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve the bid submitted by Southeast Pipe Survey, Inc. in the amount of \$61,275 for an emergency pipe repair on Ravenwood Drive.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the bid submitted by Southeast Pipe Survey, Inc. in the amount of \$61,275 for an emergency pipe repair on Ravenwood Drive.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request for the deletion of Chapter 328 - Landscape, Buffers, and Screening of the Land Development Regulations for the City of Valdosta.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that the City of Valdosta has maintained a robust Landscaping and Tree Planting Ordinance for many decades - even prior to the Land Development Regulations. This Ordinance, among other requirements, allows us to achieve our Tree City USA designation every year. The City of Valdosta has been celebrated as a Tree City USA since 1987. Staff received the directive from Council to bring Chapter 328 - Landscape, Buffers, and Screening of the Land Development Regulations (LDR) before Council such that "no property owner within the City be mandated to plant any trees of any kind - not canopy trees, not any tree." This directive is intended to relieve the cost burden for a commercial developer or developers. City Staff has not received directed input or meaningful requests from local developers regarding an amendment or revision of Chapter 328 of the LDR. This directive, if applied by Council, in the amendment of LDR Chapter 328, would render the entirety of the Chapter useless, and City Staff would not be empowered to enforce tree removal penalties, nor would Staff be empowered to require minimum plantings for newly permitted development. Understanding that every choice carries advantages and disadvantages, a very brief list of each follows: (1) Urban Forest Advantages - Reduce air temperature, Reduce stormwater runoff, Improve air quality by removing harmful pollutants, and Reduce noise, and (2) Urban Forest Disadvantages - Storm damage costs, Can block roads needed for emergency access, Can cause electrical and telecommunication outages, and Increased pavement and utility maintenance costs due to roots. Given the ramifications of this action, should Council choose to proceed, City Staff solicited feedback from local area experts as well as the Valdosta Tree Commission - which serves as a volunteer committee for the purpose of caring for and growing our urban forest. City Staff received no feedback in support of the deletion of LDR 328. There are some very important advantages that we have enjoyed for many, many years. Having come from the private side and the development side as a Developer's Engineer for many years and in many different development environments, he can honestly and objectively say that the City's Landscape Regulations are right dead in the middle. They are right where we need them to be in his opinion. They are not too extensive and they are not overly lax. They are a good perfect median. They have assessed, they have reached out to stake holders, to community stake holders, solicited input from the City Arborist, various City Staff, the Valdosta Tree Commission, and all of that input is provided in the feedback underneath the Agenda Item. He has never written this before but he wanted to make his position clear so he said Staff strongly recommends Option which is the retention of Chapter 328 and he does not endorse the deletion of this Chapter.

Councilman Howard inquired as to who wrote the LDR and the Ordinance. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that he did not know who wrote the LDR. Councilman Howard inquired as to whether the City Council make Ordinances. Councilman Howard stated that they could make adjustments to this as they see fit. Ben O'Dowd stated that could. Councilman Howard stated that is not what they asked for. They did not ask for the deletion of this. What they asked for was that they not mandate any business to have to plant any more trees because we just suffered two major storms and we do not want to put them at any more risk. They wanted to make sure that they could tell people that we do not want any trees planted within 25 feet of utility lines so when we do have a storm and the trees come down they will not interrupt utilities. That is what they asked for. They did not ask for the complete deletion. Ben O'Dowd stated that in the quoted directive that he received is what he acted upon. Councilman Howard stated that was not what we wanted. Ben O'Dowd inquired about we as in Council and as a body. Councilman Howard stated that was right. Ben O'Dowd inquired as to whether there was a unified objective here as a Council. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she never asked for it to be deleted. Ben O'Dowd stated that if Council would like to read that same Chapter and provide additions or deletions to that same Chapter then he would readily review and propose that. Councilman Howard stated that what they are asking now is that at the next Meeting they attend, they would like for that to be placed on the Agenda or they can vote on this and if they have to delete the whole thing they will because that is not what they suggested. Mayor Matheson stated that he has four options for the Council and one is to table the request to a specified date. Ben O'Dowd stated that if the decision is made to table this then he would request that Council prepare a detailed review of that same Chapter with the redline markups. He would ask that Council read that same Chapter and recommend modifications or deletions within that same Chapter. Councilman Gibbs stated that he would like to go on record that he never requested that this be deleted. All they did was to discuss it at their Retreat in September per Councilman Eric Howard's request to bring the LDR before us so that they could talk about it, discuss it, modify it, make changes. They never received an E-mail with the LDR. If they did, then it was overlooked. Councilman Carroll stated that for the record, the LDR consists of about 750 pages if his memory serves him right. Councilman Gibbs inquired of what. They did not request the whole LDR. Councilman Howard requested to see the Tree Ordinance so they could discuss it to see if it needs to be modified or changes made. Whoever decided to throw "we" in this he does not know. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that what was requested from Councilman Howard was the following: "No property owner within the City be mandated to plant any trees of any kind - not canopy trees, not

any tree. This was presented to us after we had this discussion many times to sit down as a group to read through and redline this Ordinance to make sure that what we push forward would meet the needs of the City and the community.” Councilman Gibbs asked that the first sentence or first five words be read again. Richard Hardy stated, “No property owner within the City.” Councilman Gibbs inquired as to who sent it. Richard Hardy stated that Councilman Howard sent it out to the group. Ben O’Dowd inquired as to whether it would have been prudent for him to list Councilman Howard by name in the Agenda Item. Councilman Gibbs said sure. Ben O’Dowd stated that he understood and in the future he would make that decision. Councilwoman Tooley stated that looking at the changes and adjustments she was a little taken aback that you would want to just completely delete anything without some kind of adjustment which is what they have always had from them and then take their advice on doing things. Her second thing is that with all these trees that we had tearing up the City of Valdosta, this would be a good opportunity to make some adjustments to the LDR. It has been proven more than once that it was the trees that caused the biggest issues and maybe it was the type of trees we had. Right now, and going back, she is not saying that they are going to table it but you could look at this again. They are not going to delete it. Ben O’Dowd stated that was never Staff’s recommendation. He was acting upon the directive that he received from a particular Councilman, Councilman Howard. Councilman Gibbs stated that this was the thing. They are the experts when it comes to the LDR, the Ordinance, the trees, the canopy, and all those things. That is what they are hired for. When Council requests suggestions or modifications, things planted 20 feet or 30 feet or whatever, it does not matter to him. Let’s change the trees that go along the roadways. At the end of the day, he does not know how tall a tree grows. Ben O’Dowd stated that the LDR currently calls for trees planted in, under, or near power distribution or service lines, should be under story trees which have a limited height canopy. Those are generally seen as Crepe Myrtles and under story trees. They would have no impact during storms to those same power lines. Councilman Gibbs stated that they received an E-mail today that the City Arborist cannot cut certain things if it is on or near power lines and those are the things that we need to discuss and decide whether they want to change or modify. Do they need to contract that out? Do they need to hire other people? Whatever it is so we can do different things. That’s all they are saying is that they want to discuss how we can make this better to benefit the community and not to delete it. At the end of the day, we do not need to just not plant trees. Ben O’Dowd stated that he had a simple directive and he attempted to modify or create recommendations to present to Council. He was given the directive to present this to Council urgently and it was expressed as an urgent directive so that is what he did. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether he had any modifications for them. Ben O’Dowd stated that he could not produce any meaningful modifications based on that simple directive. No property owner within the City be mandated to plant any trees of any kind, not canopy trees, not any tree. Councilman Gibbs stated that is why they are up here discussing it. Ben O’Dowd stated that residential property owners are exempt. Councilman Gibbs stated that he did not agree with not planting any trees at all. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she did not either. Councilman Harden stated that they just wanted a discussion first. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that they asked to sit down and redline and make sure we could present something we could live with. This was the directive that they were given. This is why it was brought before the Council. Councilman Harden stated that they told him what they wanted but they had never come together to do this. At this point, they need to figure out what date they need to table and discuss. Mayor Matheson stated he was going to give them an Option (4) to ask for a different directive. The Options are as follows: (1) Council can approve or deny the request as presented. (2) The Agenda Item was not advertised as a Public Hearing; however, if Council so chooses, they can make a motion to allow for Public comment on the Agenda Item with a majority vote of Council. Each side in favor and in opposition will have 15 minutes each. (3) Council can choose not to allow Public comment and continue with a motion to either approve or not approve. (4) Council can make a motion to table the request to a date certain to allow for a specific change to be made by Council and Staff to Chapter 328 of the Land Development Regulations. Councilman Howard stated that he was the one who asked for this to be brought forward and he wanted to make sure that when he makes the motion to table it, they will go in with a solution. He wants to make sure everyone is clear on what they are trying to accomplish with this. It is not to take all trees out but to make sure that the trees that are going in are not going to affect the roadways and the utility lines. They also wanted to make sure that when business owners decide to open a business, they don’t have to have a certain number of trees planted. That was the whole purpose and not to just eliminate it completely. That is why they asked for it to be discussed. He has been asking for this for five years. He would like to table it and bring it back up at the first meeting in December with the changes. Councilman Harden stated that he thinks they need a little more time than the first meeting in December. Mayor Matheson stated that maybe the first of the year. Councilman Howard asked if they thought it would take that long. Councilman Harden stated yes because they have to really dig into this to make sure it meets the needs of the citizens and the business owners. This LDR has been in place for years and they need to make sure that when they change it then it is together. Councilman Gibbs agreed. Councilman Carroll stated that whatever they do it needs

to be specific for Staff to be able to act upon that. Councilman Gibbs stated that was the whole discussion and making sure that whatever they do or whatever changes are made, that not only the citizens but Staff as well, can be maintained.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Howard to table the request for the deletion of Chapter 328 - Landscape, Buffers, and Screening of the Land Development Regulations for the City of Valdosta to the first Regular Council Meeting in January, 2025. Councilwoman Tooley seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously adopted (5-0).

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Merle Spriggs, 209 Fry Street, stated that he has a man-made problem in the neighborhood and that is drainage. The ditch needs to be cleaned out because it cannot sustain the water that comes off of Highway 84. It floods all the houses. Even with a six inch rain it still floods. There is a three foot cut in the ditch and he asked for Council's consideration in resolving the problem. The canal is between Price and Winter. This is the second time that houses have been flooded. The big ditch that handles all the water needs to be cleaned because it has not been cleaned out in 40 years.

Debbie Lorence, 7 Postpoint Circle, Worthington Woods Subdivision, stated that they have been flooded five times. They have a culvert behind their house and their home is now ruined. They have been trying for a year and a half to get something done. Their pool is ruined and during the flooding this past time, their 22,000 gallon pool overflowed. Now they say there was supposed to be a 20' swelter in their backyard. There was erosion control prior to the development being built 30 years. They have already lost \$100,000 in value of their house. The Tax Assessor lowered the value of their house \$100,000. This was their retirement home. She has asked and written and cannot get any cooperation from the City or the lawyers. They have tried and Mr. O'Dowd said the only thing he will do is dig a 20' ditch through their backyard. What is she supposed to do with a 20' ditch in her backyard? They paid \$350,000 for the house and they pay \$3,300 a year in property taxes. This is unacceptable. You are welcome to come to her house at any time to look at it. She will gladly show it to you and walk the property with you. She cannot get any cooperation because everybody is afraid of the City. It is very sad. She cannot get anybody to talk to her and not even an Engineer. She is not going anywhere and will even go to Atlanta to get a lawyer. She has all the time in the world. Now she has black mold in her house. She has got to go home and plastic half of her house now. She had a liver transplant three and a half years ago and now she is getting sick from being in the house. They had no walls and no floors for over a year and a half. This is ridiculous. She has talked to the City guys and everybody. She does not care how much it is going to cost her but somebody is going to fix her house and the problem at the road. She is tired of it.

Amos James, 200 Chester Street, stated that back-to-back years his house has flooded. The City put a retaining pond across the street from his house and for two years, he has had 18 inches of water in his house. On the outside, it is four and a half feet. His permit is still open from last year and he just got his house finished. Today, he had to gut his house again. He owns three houses in that neighborhood and two out of three got flooded. The Insurance Company is not paying for flood insurance and now FEMA is not coming in to help because it is not a disaster area. He inquired as to what he could do because he has lived in that house for 12 years. The water has never risen that high until they dug that retention pond. His tenants have called him because they had water past their ankles in the houses. He has lost everything in his house twice. He is not even talking about the Hurricane. He is talking about the flood that came in a week or two later. State Farm said that is not part of their claim. He does not know where to get any help from. They need help in that area to resolve it. He has tenants with no walls and no floors. He loves the neighborhood and he has spent lots of money fixing up the houses. He respectfully asked Council to come take a look because the retention pond was not a good idea. The drain may need to be bigger because it is not doing what it is supposed to do.

Brent Moore, 2610 Pebblewood Drive, stated that he also has a business at 1420 Gornto Road. He is the Chairman of the Tree Commission for the City and he thanked Council for tabling the discussion tonight. He would also like to provide recommendations from the Tree Commission. He is a huge believer in trees and his biggest stance is the right tree, right location, wrong tree, wrong location. They would love to see Chapter 328 not go away. He stated that if Council would like recommendations from the Tree Commission, they would be glad to provide that. There are multiple complaints about flooding and if we start getting rid of trees, it will only

compound it. He was a victim of the flood two weeks ago as well and had multiple inches of water in his business as well as in his vehicles and lawnmowers. He understands and does not want to see it get any worse. He thanked Council for what they do and he would love to be of assistance in any way that he can.

Randy Washington, 201 Price Street, stated that Merle and Amos are his neighbors and he has lived in that neighborhood for 40 years. He has detailed videos from the occurrence from October 29-30, 2023 with Hurricane Idalia. He lives on the corner of Price and Eastview and when the flood occurred, the City did respond to clear out the drain on Eastview. When he was talking to the guy on the backhoe, there is a drainage pipe underneath his ditch that feeds over to Eastview. That was clogged because he could see the debris. He pulled it out while the guy was standing there and the guy said he would clean that out as well. As Merle mentioned about the ditch in front of his house on Eastview, when Hurricane Helene came through there was no water flowing. Evidently, somewhere up the line is a blockage because in 12 years there has never been that type of flooding there in that neighborhood. He enjoys the neighborhood but they cannot continue to suffer back-to-back as they are suffering now. He listened to a video a couple of weeks ago which talked about certain spots in Valdosta that they know is an issue and in terms of hot spots, they should know what areas need more attention than others. Their area definitely needs attention. He does not know what all is on the list, but their neighborhood needs to be on the list. They need all the help and support that they can get from the City.

Chris Floyd, 200 Chester Street, stated that he has lived there for 30 years. This is the worst that he has ever seen it. The water in the holding pond had nowhere to go. The first time he had a couple of inches in his house. This last time he had sewage backed up in his house. He called a Plumber who told him there was nothing he could do until the City could pump the manholes out. He used to work with the City and if the manholes get full, there is nothing you can do. He lost a lot of his furniture. His neighborhood is a good place to live and they want something done about the ditches because they are not deep enough to hold water. A little rain comes and you have a pond in your backyard that is two to three inches deep. They need some help. They need to put some storm drains in so the water can go somewhere.

Alfred Miller, 209 Miles Street, stated that his house was also flooded. They were in the process of renovating it from Hurricane Helene when the flood water came in. His concern is looking at the liability and whose responsibility it is to keep those ditches cleaned out so they will have proper drainage. The City owns the right-of-way and is responsible for the ditches and the drainage. He inquired as to whether the City was responsible for the retention pond. If they don't have a holding pond large enough to accommodate all of that water, then he wanted to find out who was responsible and he would go from there. He knows that it takes a lot of money to clean up from these storms and sooner or later, it is up to them to find out who is responsible for keeping up the ditches. If the City is not responsive to that then there is only one more step to take and they need to figure that out and do that as a community with some type of suit.

Anthony Kier, 203 Miles Street, stated that he lives in that area and his house was flooded. He is on the lower end of the street and got it really bad. Mayor Matheson stated that as we do Citizens to be Heard, we ask that they designate a spokesperson. We are fully aware now that there is a problem in that area. Someone will meet with you after the Council Meeting.

Janice Strickland, 2105 Pin Oak Street, stated that the entire street flooded. They want to give you their story. They had flooding in Hurricane Idalia and the recent flooding. They have had damage as well due to Hurricane Helene. Every time they get flooded, they have to replace everything. This last time they had 10-12 inches of water in every room and in the bath tub. They have lost clothing, shoes, and furniture, and they do not have the money to keep replacing it every time they get flooded. She knows that is not their concern because they have not been flooded like that, but they need help. This is not all of the people who were flooded. There were people around the corner and down the street. The ditch that runs on the side of her house fills up with water because it is not dug out. It needs to be dug deeper and they need to put a pipe in there and cover it up so the water can run under the street. The last time they had the really bad flood, there was debris and stuff left on the street from Hurricane Helene so three big pipes backed up with debris. They did not come clean the ditch out until the next Thursday. When they cleaned it out, she looked and there were still branches in the middle of it. She does not think that the City is paying attention to that and every time it floods, the water fills up the ditch.

Tina McCollums, 1203 Timberline Drive, stated that their yard debris has been out by the road since Hurricane Helene. She has seen the Bunyan trucks come into her neighborhood 19 times and they have not picked up anything. She has seen City trucks just riding through burning gas. This is the stuff that has floated into the ditches and stopped them up where everybody is flooded. She got six inches of water in her garage. It has never flooded in 24 years like that. They have had to repair their roof as well. She called the City about picking up the debris and they told her the City had contracted with Bunyan; however, Bunyan has stopped picking up anything. She inquired as to who was responsible for that because she has not seen any City trucks coming around. She inquired as to what the City was doing about this. There are big piles of debris and this needs to be addressed for her entire neighborhood.

Michael Moorese, Madison County, Florida resident, stated that he addressed the Council several months ago about the sewage spills in the Withlacoochee and Suwanee River systems. He held up a bottle of water that came from a well a short distance from the Withlacoochee River that tested positive for E-Coli and fecal matter. When he addressed the Council last, it was expressed that measures were being taken to increase capacity and address the issues. Months later it happened again. It appears that there are a lot of people in our community who are hurting and need help. He inquired as to what steps have been taken since his last meeting with the Council and what has been done to address the issue and prevent further spills from happening. He would like to know where the City is at in the process. Citizens' concerns were brought to him about the delay in reporting and notifications. Again, it was days before the citizens in Madison County were notified that the Withlacoochee River was contaminated and their wells may contain fecal matter and E-Coli. He understands that those notifications pass through several hands before they get to them so there could be a delay. In his personal opinion and the people who live on the Withlacoochee River, it is unacceptable that it takes such a long time and maybe we need to look into a different process of notification so that if their wells are contaminated they don't drink it. The E-Coli and fecal matter numbers were so high this last time the water was unsafe to drink and unsafe for recreational use. These people use the well water for their drinking water and they are bathing in it every day. Time is of the essence for people to be notified so people don't drink this water. He thanked the Council for their time and understanding in this matter.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that regarding all the concerns that were brought forward tonight from the citizens, the City is definitely engaged to rectify these situations and to make sure that anything that happens is looked at and taken care. During the last 13 months, we have had three hurricanes and two floods. This last storm, we had over 17 inches of rain in certain areas. You can be assured that the City is planning and is prepared to do everything possible to keep the City and its citizens safe. On another note, there are a couple events coming up soon such as Black Friday on November 29, 2024 in the Downtown area. The businesses will have special deals and promotions. On November 30, 2024, Small Business Saturday will be from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and citizens are encouraged to come out and support small businesses in our community. We have asked all citizens to place their storm debris out to the roadside by December 1, 2024 so we can get it picked up. This is not the cutoff date but we are urging people to get it placed by the road. On December 4, 2024, the Mayor's Motorcade will take place at Parkwood Developmental Center. On December 6, 2024, the Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Event will take place at 6:00 p.m. at Unity Park. This will be done in partnership with Lowndes County. On December 7, 2024, the Greater Valdosta Christmas Parade will take place from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Howard stated that he hated that citizens had to come out to the Council Meeting because of the flooding and tree debris; however, we want you to continue to come even if it is about something like this. As a Council, they are not privy to the day-to-day operations of the City so a lot of times things are being done and you guys know before they do. If you have anything that you are adamant about, contact the Council so they can make sure some of this stuff is put on the list and they have some answers for you. They knew it was flooding, but if you see a ditch or culvert that needs to be cleaned out then reach out to the Council so they can get it done.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that she was glad the citizens were here tonight and she always asks that they come to the Council Meetings. The first thing that she would like to clarify is that when one of the citizens came up and asked who was responsible for the holding pond. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that there are several

holding ponds throughout the City and it depends on what area of the City it is in. The City owns and maintains some and then the Georgia Department of Transportation owns some. Others are owned by private communities. Councilwoman Tooley stated that they have talked to the citizens who live on Pin Oak and she has been out there in the rain when they were having problems. The pipe was unclogged and they were told they would not have flooding anymore. She has been asking for that. One thing she was told was that they would put in a holding pond in that area. Richard Hardy stated that they were looking at putting in a stormwater facility on Lakeland Avenue that would take on and dissipate water as it comes in. Councilwoman Tooley stated that is why she said they had been trying because she cannot say when it is going to happen. They are sorry about the flooding and asked that we put some urgency on it. There was one citizen who was moving from the area because he was tired of the flooding. He did not like the way the City was maintaining it. Some people have been in their houses for 40 years and have been paying their taxes and doing what the City asks you to do so you want the City to give it back. We are trying and will keep on trying. She wants the citizens to keep coming to the Council Meetings and talking to the City Manager. She will also be going to some of the State Representatives and ask for funding for infrastructure.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Mayor's Motorcade is pretty special and the Valdosta Fire Department has been collecting Christmas items and toiletry items that they take to Parkwood Developmental Center every year. They find as much joy in giving presents as those 150 residents do in receiving them. They meet with the residents and give out the presents and let them sit on the Fire Truck. Also, he has heard all of the citizens who came forward tonight. Hurricane Helene, which was our third hurricane, mixed in with the 70 mile per hour straight-line wind, left us a lot of gifts and left us unprepared for the 17 inches of rain in a 48 hour period. Hurricane Helene left us with every creek and stream and river full of thousands of trees and root balls. Those are instant beaver dams. With every creek, stream, and tributary in our stormwater program, and then all the debris on the side of the roads, it made every single curve, gutter, ditch, and drain useless. The water had to go somewhere else and we flooded in places that we never even dreamed we could flood in this town. We are working a plan and our workers are tired and they just keep going. Everything he just mentioned has happened in a 14-month period of time. Our employees are working hard every single day and night. During one of the hurricanes they were working 24 hours. We put two of our best crews under lights during the course of the night. The City's roll-offs are blue and the others are AshBritt's. We have four times more debris than Hurricane Idalia.

Councilman Harden stated that there were a lot of people who did not have flood insurance and they are having some issues with FEMA about not being qualified. There were certain requirements that you had to meet. He attended a meeting this week where they were trying to come up with solutions for those who were affected and could not get anything done. After the Council Meeting tonight, he would like to get that information from those in attendance. Also, there are a lot of people who are tapped financially and they have several Christmas events coming up. There is an event with an organization called Beautiful Creations by Chanel as well as Toys in the Hood at the Mildred Hunter Center on December 14, 2024. We have a lot of employees who are working around the clock and we are going to keep at it. Councilman Harden also inquired about the stormwater facility on Park Avenue. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that we have asked for congressional funding to help fund that; however, we have started the plans to move forward. Councilman Harden stated that some of this stuff was before their time and they are trying to make a difference. Council passed an Ordinance three weeks ago to enhance our water system before the storm even came. They have been working on this and they are trying to correct some things. They hear what the citizens are saying.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that there is an organization called South Street Community Care House and they feed people and help provide resources for them. On November 27, 2024, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., they will be sponsoring a luncheon for the County and City employees at the Valdosta Parks and Recreation Authority building located at 1901 Barack Obama Boulevard. They like to give back and show their appreciation because the employees have been working hard.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Howard, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to adjourn the November 21, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:42 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, December 5, 2024.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta