

**MINUTES**  
**MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL**  
**5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2025**  
**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, Eric Howard, Sandra Tooley, Tim Carroll, Nick Harden, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Andy Gibbs and City Manager Richard Hardy were absent. The invocation was given by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes from the April 24, 2025 Regular Meeting were approved by unanimous consent (6-0). The minutes from the May 8, 2025 Regular Meeting are forthcoming.

**PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**ORDINANCE NO. 2025-9, AN ORDINANCE FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET**

Public Hearing for the Adoption of the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

Catherine Ammons, Assistant City Manager, stated that in accordance with Georgia Code 36-81-3, each local government shall adopt and operate under an annual balanced budget for the General Fund, each Special Revenue Fund, and each Debt Service Fund in use by the local government. The annual balanced Budget shall be adopted by Ordinance or Resolution. A Budget Ordinance is balanced when the sum of estimated revenues and appropriated fund balances is equal to appropriations. Nothing contained in the above-mentioned Code precludes a local government from adopting a Budget for any funds used by the local government other than those specified in paragraph one. These funds include Enterprise Funds, Internal Service Funds, and Permanent funds. The Fiscal Year 2026 Proposed City of Valdosta Budget has been reviewed and discussed at previous meetings, and a Public Hearing has been conducted to afford citizens the opportunity to make comments on funding levels. The proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget does include a 5% utility rate increase based upon the Water Rate Analysis and Sufficiency Study adopted by Mayor and Council as well as a 3% additional increase to fund anticipated debt service. This increase is also anticipated across the City's other two utility services. The General Fund Budget presented is balanced with a projected millage rate equal to the FY 25 rate (assuming anticipated growth in the digest). The proposed Budget also includes a 5% cost of living adjustment for career employees effective July 1, 2025. The City's medical clinic continues to be funded in this proposed Budget, with no increase in employee contributions for any City benefit offered. The consolidated proposed Budget (uses) increased \$5.12 million (or 3.8%) when compared to Fiscal Year 2025. There are increases in personnel due to 5% COLA that are partially offset by smaller cuts across the City. Catherine Ammons, Assistant City Manager, recommended that Council approve the Ordinance adopting the City of Valdosta's Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

No one spoke in favor of this request.

No one spoke in opposition to this request.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Harden, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2025-9, an Ordinance for the Adoption of the Fiscal Year 2026 Budget, the complete text which will be found in Ordinance Book XV.

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

Consideration of bids for the purchase of 25 Traffic Controllers for the Engineering Department (RFQ-16-25).

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that the Traffic Division of the Engineering Department needs to purchase some specialized inventory to have in stock. These controllers hook into the traffic cabinets to assist with the timing of certain lights throughout the City. The City lost additional controllers during Hurricane Helene, therefore making the controllers essential to restock. The Traffic Division would like to purchase 25 traffic controllers. Funds are budgeted each year for a purchase such as this, and \$52,000 was budgeted for FY25. Sealed bids were received on April 29, 2025 with the low bid submitted by Utilicom Supply Associates in the amount of \$2,370.05 for each controller for a total amount of \$59,251.25. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the low bid of Utilicom Supply Associates in the amount of \$59,251.25 for 25 traffic controllers.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Harden, seconded by Councilman McIntyre, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the low bid of Utilicom Supply Associates in the amount of \$59,251.25 for 25 traffic controllers for the Engineering Department.

Consideration of bids for extension of utilities in the area of Park Avenue and Inner Perimeter Road.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that with the private development occurring in northeast Valdosta in the areas of Park Avenue and Inner Perimeter Road, there is a need for the City to extend water and sewer mains to serve this area. These extensions have been included in the City's long range Utility planning with timing dependent upon customer/development needs and City funding. In 2024, City Council approved the Design Contract for these utilities. Construction plans were completed, necessary easements were acquired, and the Construction Project has been bid. The work for this Project includes the installation of +/-7800' of new water main, +/-3000' of new gravity sanitary sewer, +/-1500' of new sanitary sewer force main, one new sewage lift station, the associated sanitary sewer manholes, water main fittings and appurtenances, and other related grading, demolition, repair and patching, grading, grassing, and all related work. An invitation for bids was posted on the City's website and on the Georgia Procurement website in accordance with State Law and City policies. Eight firms (four prime Contractors and four Subcontractors) attended the pre-bid meeting on April 22, 2025. Two bids were received and opened at 10:00 a.m. on May 8, 2025. The low bid was considered both responsive and responsible. The low bid was submitted by JWA Associates, Inc. in the amount of \$2,959,737.00 plus a 10% contingency (\$295,973.70) for unknown field conditions for a total Project cost of \$3,255,710.70. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by JWA Associates, Inc. in the amount of \$2,959,737.00 plus a 10% contingency (\$295,973.70) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total Project cost of \$3,255,710.70.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Howard, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the low bid submitted by JWA Associates, Inc. in the amount of \$2,959,737.00 plus a 10% contingency (\$295,973.70) to handle any unforeseen circumstances for a total Project cost of \$3,255,710.70 for extension of utilities in the area of Park Avenue and Inner Perimeter Road.

## LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a Cost Recovery Plan for the Inner Perimeter Road Utilities Extension Project.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that With the private development occurring in northeast Valdosta in the areas of Park Avenue and Inner Perimeter Road, there is a need for the City to extend water and sewer mains to serve this area. These extensions have been included in the City's long range Utility planning with timing dependent upon customer/development needs and City funding. In 2024, City Council approved the Design Contract for these utilities. Construction plans were completed, necessary easements were acquired, and the Construction Project has been bid. The City of Valdosta Ordinance Section 98-96 states the following: In order to promote growth and development in an area of the City, the Mayor and Council may cause the major water transmission lines, sewer outfalls, lift stations, and treatment facilities to be installed and assess the total cost for materials and construction of the system to all properties benefited. The assessment shall be paid to the City prior to connection to the system and shall be in addition to the cost of any lines required to connect the individual users. In accordance with the City Ordinance, if Council approves this cost recovery plan, each user who makes connection to the lift station or gravity sewers which drain to the lift station would pay \$15.00 per GPD based on the connecting party's proposed daily discharge volume (see below for calculation). The proposed daily discharge

volume for each connecting user will need to be corroborated and approved by either the City Engineer or the Utilities Director either at the time of connection or at the time of issuance of a building permit. Some examples of one-time cost recovery fees based on a range of prospective uses are as follows: (1) Single Family Residence - \$3,750 (250 GPD), (2) Commercial Development with two restrooms - \$12,000 (800 GPD), and (3) Apartment Complex with 100 bedrooms - \$150,000 (10,000 GPD). For comparison, a new septic system and drain field for a single-family residence can cost \$10,000+ and a private lift station and force main for a small apartment complex or large commercial development can cost \$250,000+. A cost recovery plan for a water main extension without a clearly defined single user is difficult to assess given the corporate benefit of a well distributed and interconnected water system. Cost recovery plans for gravity sewer main extensions without a clearly defined single user are similarly difficult to assess. Lift stations have a clearly defined and practical service radius as well as a defined maximum service capacity. For this reason, Staff is recommending that the clearly distinguishable elements of this Project, which comprise the lift station and force main construction, be recovered from the properties who connect to this portion of the sewer system gradually over time. The total estimated cost of these elements based on the unit cost Contract Proposal from the apparent low bidder, JWA, is \$1,275,000.00. The lift station in question is designed with a maximum service capacity of 85,000 gallons per day (GPD). The total cost of the Project is approximately \$3,000,000. Further background - City of Valdosta Ordinance Sections 98-651 and 98-652 state the following: The purpose of the construction cost recovery is for the City to recover part of the construction cost for the installation of water transmission mains and trunk sewer lines. This will be done by means of a surcharge fee based on either the area of development or the potential water and/or sewer demand from the development, whichever is greater. Such fees shall be as set forth in the schedule of fees and charges on file in the office of the City Clerk. The fee required by this Division will be paid upon receipt of an application for a building permit for all development other than single-family residential. The cost recovery fee for single-family residential subdivisions shall be paid at the time a subdivision phase is accepted for recording for sale of the lots. There shall also be an amortization charge placed on the schedule for permits that are applied for after each January 1, following the date of completion of construction. This amortization fee shall be applied to the base surcharge rates effective January 1 and on each succeeding year until development is complete or the construction cost recovery is rescinded. Should there be a use or development that is not specifically listed in the water or sewer use schedule, the City Engineer or the Director of Utilities shall have the authority to compute an equivalent sewer use based on the equivalent residential rate established. It should also be noted that the construction cost recovery fee is over and above any other fee established by the City. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the cost recovery fee of \$15 per gallon per day. This is a one-time fee that new connectees would pay upon connection to the public system in this location. If each person pays \$15 per gallon per day, over time, once it is max at capacity then the connectees will have paid for the construction. Effectively, it costs this much to build and it benefits these people so we are recommending that we back charge that cost to the people who are connecting to it slowly over time. He selected for three random uses that he felt were representative of the types of uses that this life station might see connection which is a single-family residence, a commercial development with two restrooms, and then an apartment complex with 100 bedrooms.

Councilman Harden stated that is a one-time \$15 fee. Ben O'Dowd stated that if you use 1,000 gallons per day it would be \$15 times that 1,000 gallons which is a one-time fee paid at the outset. If it is a single development, it would be paid as part of the permit fee or service establishment fee for customer service. If it is a subdivision, then the cost would be borne by the Developer prior to the final platting.

Councilwoman Tooley inquired as to how long they would expect it to last. Would this be 10-15 years? She thought we should charge more. Ben O'Dowd stated that based on the Ordinance and by State law, we can only charge what it costs us. We can charge where it is pro-rated based on inflation; however, that may be an administrative nightmare of tracking that cost. He would defer to the City Attorney as to whether that would be legal. This is effectively a tapping fee and not something that we have a habit of doing in the past. To his knowledge, this has not been done in a very long time.

**A MOTION** was made by Councilman Carroll to approve the request as presented for a Cost Recovery Plan for the Inner Perimeter Road Utilities Extension Project. Councilman Howard seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously adopted (5-1) with Councilwoman Tooley voting in opposition.

Consideration of a request to approve a Quit Claim Deed for the sale of property by 211/213 South Ashley Street, LLC.

Tim Tanner, City Attorney, stated that the current owner of Parcel 01200A 255 and 01200A 256 is 211/213 South Ashley Street, LLC. They have recently entered into an agreement for sale of the property. In the purchaser's due diligence, they discovered that a small portion of the property has unclear title. It appears that it is the portion of an abandoned railroad bed that was part of the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad Company line. The City is not aware of any current ownership of this small fragment, but to the extent that it helps clear the title for the potential purchase and redevelopment of these lots, a Quit Claim Deed is needed. The purpose of the Quit Claim Deed is to release any right, title, and interest that the City of Valdosta may have in the abandoned Atlantic Coast Line Railroad that bisects or runs adjacent to the property. Tim Tanner, City Attorney, recommended that Council approve the Quit Claim Deed for the sale of property by 211/213 South Ashley Street, LLC.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Howard, seconded by Councilman McIntyre, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the Quit Claim Deed for the sale of property by 211/213 South Ashley Street, LLC.

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

Consideration of appointments to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Citizens Advisory Committee.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Citizens Advisory Committee has four members, Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody, Councilwoman Sandra Tooley, Dr. Beverly Richardson-Blake, and Deborah White, whose terms expired on February 24, 2025. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that were adopted by Mayor and Council. The applicants are as follows: (1) Councilwoman Sandra Tooley - RN (SGMC Health), (2) Dr. Beverly Richardson-Blake - Retired from Valdosta State University, and (3) Deborah White - Retired. Councilwoman Miller-Cody is interested in reapplying for her slot and she has turned in a new Board Application for consideration during the next round of Board appointments. Mayor Matheson stated that if there was no objection from Council, since there are three applicants and four slots, they will be reappointed by acclamation. There was no objection from Council. Councilwoman Sandra Tooley, Dr. Beverly Richardson-Blake, and Deborah White were reappointed to serve a four-year term on the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Citizens Advisory Committee.

Consideration of appointments to the Public Art Advisory Committee.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Public Art Advisory Committee has the following slots to be filled: (1) Slot 1 (Thressea Boyd) - LVAC Board Member whose term will expire June 1, 2025, (2) Slot 2 (Steven S. Walker) - LVAC Professional Artist whose term will expire June 1, 2025, and (3) Slot 3 (Moniker Meler) - Community At Large whose term will expire June 1, 2025. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant to apply was Craig Hawkins - Artist/Professor (Valdosta State University) for the Community At Large Slot. Mayor Matheson stated that if there is no objection from Council, since there is only one applicant for the Community At Large slot, Craig Hawkins will be appointed by acclamation. There was no objection from Council. Craig Hawkins will serve a term of three years on the Public Art Advisory Committee.

Consideration of appointments to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Airport Authority has two members, Paul Hamilton, whose term will expire on May 21, 2025, and George Page, who resigned due to personal reasons and whose term will expire on May 11, 2026. Mr. Hamilton has expressed an interest in being reappointed. These appointments were advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The applicants are as follows: Slot (1) - Paul Hamilton - Attorney at Law, Hamilton Trust Estate & Elder Law, and Slot (2) Fill the unexpired term of George Page - David DiSalvo, President & CEO of the Rainwater Conference. Mayor Matheson stated that if there is no objection from Council, since there are two slots and two applicants, Paul Hamilton will be reappointed by acclamation to serve a four year term and David DiSalvo will be appointed by acclamation to fill the unexpired term of George Page. There was no objection from Council.

Consideration of an appointment to the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Adjustments & Appeals.

Mayor Matheson stated that the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals has a member, Nancy Hobby, whose term will expire on July 1, 2025. Ms. Hobby has expressed an interest in being reappointed. This appointment was advertised according to the Boards, Commissions, Authorities, and Advisory Committees Policy that was adopted by Mayor and Council. The only applicant to apply was Ms. Hobby. Mayor Matheson stated that if there is no objection from Council, Nancy Hobby will be reappointed by acclamation to serve a three year term on the Valdosta-Lowndes County Zoning Board of Appeals.

### **CITIZENS TO BE HEARD**

Kelly Saxton, 8 Baldwin Place, thanked the Mayor and Council for their support of the Mental Health Day at Unity Park recently. Also, June 1<sup>st</sup> is rapidly approaching and that is the start of storm season here in Valdosta. We hope and pray we get a break this year, but if we don't, we need to consider some buildings to use for inclement weather. She has seen several seniors who are homeless lately and the Valdosta Police Department and ambulances have been called out due to heat exhaustion. She is asking that we revisit the Craig Center building on Gordon Street and look at what can we do to possibly put it back to use. She is asking for Council's support.

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

Catherine Ammons, Assistant City Manager, stated that this is Public Works Week and the Public Works Department is under the leadership of Public Works Director Larry Ogden. She is humbled and honored to work side-by-side with them and asked everyone to recognize the Public Works employees for their hard work and dedication. Also, the City of Valdosta Offices will be closed on Monday, May 26, 2025 in observance of Memorial Day and to honor those brave women and men who have made sacrifices for our country.

### **COUNCIL COMMENTS**

Councilman Howard stated that this is a holiday weekend and everyone should be safe. If you don't have a license, registration, or insurance, you need to park your car.

Councilwoman Tooley stated that the Public Works Director came out to speak to some citizens about the trash pickup and he did a wonderful job explaining it to them. We need to do that more often. She thanked Larry Ogden and the Public Works Department.

Mayor Matheson stated that there is a School Crossing Guard of the Year Ceremony tomorrow morning at Greenleaf. There will also be two Memorial Day Ceremonies on Monday, May 26, 2025 with one at 10:00 a.m. at Sunset Cemetery and the other one at 2:45 p.m. at the AMVETS Post 607 on Highway 84.

Councilman Harden stated that the AMVETS Post 607 will also have an event on Sunday, May 25, 2025 at Unity Park. There will be music, food, and vendors.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the May 22, 2025 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:59 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, June 5, 2025.