

City Beat



City Delivers a Balanced Budget

After making some tough decisions that resulted in the reduction of over \$6 million of department requests, the City of Valdosta Fiscal Year 2016 Budget, balanced and with no property tax increase, was approved by the Mayor and City Council at their June 25 City Council Meeting.

City Council approved the \$85 million budget—following over six hours of presentations at the June 9 and 10 public hearings—that includes no tax increase, and one they feel meets the expectations of Valdosta citizens. While the document specifically outlines the financial uses throughout FY 2016, city leaders still weigh every purchase with actual revenue flow and an assessment of real needs.

The Valdosta Fire Department is once again fighting fire with knowledge through its 2nd Annual Citizens Fire Academy, which will educate citizens on the services provided by the VFD, increase fire and life-safety awareness, and establish a community partnership.

The academy will take place each Tuesday night for nine weeks from 6-9 p.m., beginning Sept. 1 and ending Oct. 27. Classes will meet at the VFD Regional Training Center, and dinner will be provided each night. Interested citizens must be at least 18 years old and complete an application, background check and release of liability form. The application deadline is July 31, 2015.

Participants will learn all aspects of the department's operations, have an opportunity to participate in the VFD's Ride Along Program, and will also receive valuable life-safety CPR certification training. On the last Tuesday of the program, a formal graduation ceremony will take place at the training center.

Although the program is free, selected participants must commit to attend each Tuesday session throughout the nine-week academy.

For more information about the 2nd Annual Citizens Fire Academy, call the VFD at (229) 333-1835.

The economic downturn has resulted in \$1 million less in sales tax collections since the year 2009, and the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) this year alone is expected to generate approximately \$800,000 less than projected. Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) VII collections are also not meeting projections countywide. According to the current trends, the city will receive a projected \$12 million less than originally projected—or \$68 million over the six-year SPLOST cycle. So while the cost of doing business and the demands for services have not decreased, some of the city's largest sources of revenue have considerably fallen short of expectations.

Even so, Valdosta—Georgia's 14th largest city—continues to have one of the lowest millage rates among peer cities in the state. With a property tax of 6.106 mills, Valdosta's millage rate remains lower than it was in 1992, when it was 6.25 mills. Furthermore, property taxes make up only 25 percent of the general fund and 10 percent of the city's total budget.

The FY 2016 Budget provides the necessary resources to ensure the city is operated in a fiscally responsible manner. It ensures the city can provide the necessary services to meet the needs of the city and its citizens.

Over one-third of the city's budget—approximately \$32 million—is for capital improvement projects, of which a significant amount is earmarked for completing the new Wastewater Treatment Plant and Force Main Project. These projects were budgeted over two years and together make up about \$55 million. Both are on track to be completed ahead of schedule in early 2016. The budget also includes two fire trucks that will replace vehicles that are over 15 years old, 17 police car replacements, necessary renovations to fire stations, road improvements, resurfacing, sidewalks and other capital projects.

The City of Valdosta FY 2016 budget, effective July 1, 2015, may be viewed at www.valdostacity.com.



Choose Safety this July 4th

Starting July 1, the sale of consumer fireworks will be legal in Georgia, and with bigger explosives comes bigger risks. All citizens should be aware of these risks and employ the proper safety measures to prevent harm to themselves and those around them during the upcoming Independence Day celebrations.

Capt. James Clinkscales, Fire Marshal of the Valdosta Fire Department, says the newly legal fireworks are more dangerous, raising the possibility of fires and injury due to the misuse of these explosives.

Whenever handling fireworks or accompanying someone who is doing so, remember these safety guidelines to ensure a fun and incident-free celebration:

- Always use fireworks according to the manufacturer requirements listed on the box.
- Always have water and/or a fire extinguisher on hand.
- Never relight a firework that has gone out; instead douse it in water and discard the device.
- Never aim fireworks at people, vehicles or buildings.
- Do not wear loose-fitting clothing when handling fireworks because such clothes can get caught in the fireworks and catch fire.
- Never allow children to use fireworks.
- Always stand 50-100 feet away from buildings when using fireworks.
- Never shoot fireworks within 100 yards of a gas station, which is illegal.

Also know that the sale of fireworks to anyone under the age of 18 is illegal and can be punished with a \$2,500 fine. Fireworks can be used from 10 a.m. to midnight on normal days, and from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. on holidays (July 3-4, Dec. 31 and Jan. 1).

For more information on firework safety, contact the VFD at (229) 333-1836.

Don't Forget the Pets!

While the Fourth of July is full of fun for humans, it has the potential to be a miserable and dangerous day for pets, especially dogs, due to the excessive noise and festivities. Remember the following tips to ensure your pet stays happy and healthy this Independence Day.

- Keep your pet indoors at all times.
- Never use fireworks around pets.
- Leave your pet at home.
- Have your pet properly identified.
- Keep your pet away from glow jewelry.
- Keep your pet away from lighter fluid and matches.



For more information on this topic, contact Lowndes County Animal Welfare at (229) 671-2760.

Fireworks Spectacular July 4 Near Valdosta Mall

Rather than endure the risks of handling fireworks, the City of Valdosta encourages citizens to enjoy the Fireworks Spectacular event hosted by the Valdosta-Lowndes Parks and Recreation Authority that will take place near the Valdosta Mall, on Saturday, July 4, at nightfall. In the event of inclement weather, the event will take place on Sunday, July 5.

Call VLPRA at (229) 259-3548 for more information.

City Announces 10 Public Service Opportunities

Citizens who seek a rewarding public service role in the community are encouraged to apply for the 10 positions currently vacant on the city's boards, commissions, authorities or advisory committees. These volunteer positions, requiring only a few hours each month, are designed to give citizens a voice in their local government and allow them to influence decisions that shape the quality of life for residents in the community. Anyone who has been a resident of Lowndes County for at least six months prior to the nomination is eligible to apply.

The Mayor and City Council will evaluate the applicants and appoint individuals to the vacancies at the Aug. 6 City Council meeting. Interested citizens have until July 29 to review the membership requirements, complete an application and sign the Code of Ethics form for any of the following 10 positions:

- **Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC) – 4 Appointments.** Please note the requirements for each PAAC position: Position 1 must be a member of the Lowndes/ Valdosta Arts Commission (LVAC) and a member of the LVAC Board of Directors; Position 2 must be a LVAC member and a professional artist; and Positions 3 and 4 are designated for two community-at-large members.
- **Valdosta-Lowndes County Construction Board of Adjustments & Appeals – 1 Appointment.**
- **Community Development Block Grant Advisory Committee – 2 Appointments.**
- **Valdosta Tree Commission – 3 Appointments.**

The city seeks to ensure all citizens are aware of opportunities to serve, to have a professional and structured process through which to seek appointments, to appoint qualified individuals who have a willingness and desire to serve, and to ensure diversity in the make-up of the entities. For more information or to obtain the necessary forms, visit www.valdostacity.com or call (229) 259-3500.

Drive Alert. Arrive Alive.

Traffic fatalities in Georgia have increased during the first quarter of 2015, compared to the same time last year, according to the Georgia Department of Transportation. With an average of 100 deaths a month, Georgia is on track for 1,200 fatalities in 2015, which would be the first increase in nine years.

What Can You Do? Most single-vehicle crashes can be prevented by changing driver behavior. Traffic fatalities are often due to distractions. More drivers are just not focused on driving. They're talking on the phone, texting, adjusting the radio, using the GPS, applying makeup, eating or just daydreaming. Take responsibility to protect yourself, your passengers, other drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Follow these steps every time you get behind the wheel.



VSEB Helping Local Small Businesses

Small business owners are reminded to take advantage of opportunities for growth and development



by applying to become a member of the Valdosta Small Emerging Business Program, more commonly known as VSEB.

VSEB participants have the opportunity to provide services to larger area businesses, industries, and corporations. The city makes an effort to award at least 10 percent of the city contracts to qualified VSEB participants.

For more information, call the Neighborhood Development Division at (229) 671-3617.

Main Street Hosts Restaurant Week



Don't miss out on the exciting tastes and sensations of Downtown Valdosta's Restaurant Week 2015, which will take place July 20-25. Citizens can add flavor and fun to their summer by participating in the following events:

Taste of Downtown: July 20, 5-9 p.m.

Buying a \$20 wristband at the historic courthouse square will get you a pour of a signature drink and a taste of a meal from each restaurant's prix fixe (fixed price) menu for the week. Live music will also fill the square as citizens explore the downtown culinary scene.

Restaurant Week: July 21-25, 5-9 p.m.

Come out for lunch and dinner each day to discover the delicious eats downtown restaurants have to offer. No tickets required; just bring a healthy appetite! Ask for the Restaurant Week menu and enjoy a three-course prix fixe meal.

Share your meals and adventures from Restaurant Week 2015 by using the hashtag #restaurantweekdvd on social media. For more information on this event, contact Main Street at (229) 259-3577.

BATTLE OF THE BADGES RETURNS

Citizens, prepare yourselves for battle. The Valdosta Fire and Police Departments will host the 2nd Annual Battle of the Badges—Guns & Hoses—Blood Drive on Thursday, July 30, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., in the Valdosta City Hall Annex Multi-Purpose Room, located at 300 N. Lee Street.

The friendly interdepartmental competition, which is open to the public, seeks to aid the American Red Cross in their life-saving efforts.

City employees, retirees, and their family members and friends, as well as members of the general public, are invited to give the gift of life at the event. Blood donors will be asked when they arrive which team they support for the competition.

Last year's event received overwhelming community support, bringing in 91 units of blood – the most ever collected at a Valdosta City blood drive. At that competition, the VPD beat the VFD by only three units of blood, 47 to 44.

Registration is encouraged but not required. To make an appointment, citizens may visit www.redcrossblood.org, and enter keyword: cityval.

For more information, call the Valdosta Fire Department at (229) 333-1835 or the Valdosta Police Department at (229) 293-3102.

Keep Watch



and keep your city

SAFE

Keeping your streets safe could be as easy as getting together with your neighbors.

Neighborhood Watch is a national program endorsed by the Valdosta Police Department that for decades has allowed citizens to fight crime in their communities. The purpose of the program is to unite law enforcement agencies, private organizations and individual citizens in a massive effort to reduce residential crime.

Valdosta has 13 active and 14 inactive watch groups. To be considered active, groups must meet at least four times a year. Each October, the VPD meets with local watch groups to assist them in their endeavors to prevent local crime and build stronger neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods are the backbone of a community, and watch groups not only keep neighborhoods safe but also contribute to the overall health of the city.

Neighborhood watch is not only for your neighborhood; you can and should practice safety wherever you go.

To start or join a watch group, call Officer Vernotis Williams at (229) 293-3099.

Special Pickups 101



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

There's more to garbage collection than meets the eye. Each week the city's Public Works Department serves over 18,000 customers with sanitation services, which include pickups for household garbage, recyclables and yard waste. Citizens who need to dispose of larger, bulkier items that do not fit into the roll-out bins require what's known as a "special pickup."

Special pickups are items that require "special" handling—such as appliances, furniture and other large household items. A special pickup is also required for garbage that is not containerized, yard waste or construction materials mixed with trash, building materials and all other large or heavy items.

The most common special pickups used to cost \$10-\$20. However, a \$2 per month residential sanitation fee increase, effective July 1, has eliminated the \$10-\$20 fees for *normal* residential special pickups. Under the new policy, sanitation crews will automatically pick up debris piles that measure 4 ft. x 8 ft. x 5 ft. (see figure 1) or less at no cost, and citizens are not required to call Public Works to arrange these small special pickups. Sanitation customers who utilize the free special pickups for small piles even twice a

year—which in the past would have cost between \$20 and \$40—will notice little to no difference in their annual sanitation costs.

Dispatching sanitation trucks for larger piles require additional costs. There is a \$45 charge for piles larger than 4 ft. x 8 ft. x 5 ft. (see figure 2) and a \$90 charge for piles larger than 6 ft. x 10 ft. (see figure 3).

Citizens are required to call and schedule these larger pickups. The major reason for the need to call and for the associated costs is that larger piles normally require the use of a claw truck. These trucks are costly to operate, have limited storage capacity, requiring more frequent trips to the landfill and significantly higher disposal charges, since disposal charges are generated based on weight.

According to Valdosta City Ordinance Sec. 4-2003, all property owners and/or property management companies that serve dispossession—or eviction—notice to residents are responsible for calling for a special pickup the day before the dispossession is to be served to the resident. Failure to comply will result in additional charges.

For information on sanitation services, call (229) 259-3590.

The Dos & Donts of Trash Collection

Each day, the city's fleet of seven garbage trucks services 3,500 homes and businesses, faithfully whisking away your trash and other discarded items. Here are some reminders that will make the garbage pick-up process as easy and efficient as possible.

The Dos

- Do put your roll-out, yard waste and recycling at the curb no later than 5 a.m. on your collection day and remove empty containers no later than noon the day after collection.
- Do bag and securely tie all garbage.
- Do close lids on the roll-out and have your container opening toward the street or alley.
- Do keep the weight of garbage and container at 40 pounds or less.
- Do flatten boxes and place in recycle bin or next to roll-out.
- Do recycle as much as possible.

The Donts

- Don't place roll-out next to mailboxes or in front of parked vehicles.
- Don't place junk, car parts, construction materials, rocks, sand, dirt, bricks or heavy items in roll-out.
- Don't place hot ashes, coals or burning material in roll-out because they can lead to fire.
- Don't take your containers when you move. Containers are assigned to the address and marked with a serial number.
- Don't place loose trash, yard waste or recyclable items (including cardboard) in roll-out.
- Don't place Hazardous Waste (paint, motor oil, gasoline, pesticides, etc.) in roll-out. These items are accepted at Care Environmental. Call (229) 242-6565 for more information on proper Hazardous Waste disposal.



HURRICANE SEASON: Be Prepared

We are already one month into Hurricane Season, which officially runs June 1 through November 30. Although meteorologists predict slightly below-normal activity in the Atlantic, the one thing they cannot tell us is where these storms are going to make landfall.

Kelly Godsey, Meteorologist with the National Weather Service, Tallahassee, Florida, says that a below-normal season—like we saw in 2014—does not mean that these massive storms will not cause a lot of damage.

It only takes one storm to cause significant damage. Even though Valdosta is over 70 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico, and a little further from the Atlantic, tropical systems bring impacts well inland for hundreds of miles.

This impact Godsey refers to comes in the form of possible heavy rainfall and flooding, and potential for tornadoes and strong winds. For

this reason, it is very important for citizens to know their risks and to be prepared for the associated hazards.

Godsey says the most important thing is to learn your risk. For example, learn if you are in a flood zone; learn if there are areas that are particularly vulnerable to strong winds in your area; and assess the trees or similar hazards that could be brought down in strong winds. These are all examples of precautions to consider BEFORE the storm approaches.

Fortunately, there is plenty of information available to help citizens prepare for Hurricane Season. Citizens are encouraged to view the following websites, which contain information from how hurricanes form to how to get storm ready in your area:

- www.srh.noaa.gov
- www.hurricanes.gov
- www.ready.ga.gov

When You Lose Power

When the storm is raging, and the lights are flickering, make sure you know who to call if your power goes out. Power outages can be reported to Georgia Power in a variety of ways. Citizens who utilize their services can call (888) 891-0938. At www.georgiapower.com/storm, citizens can report power outages, view a map of outages in the area, and sign up for outage alerts that give an estimated time of restoration and the cause of the outage. The website also offers instructions on downloading a mobile app that allows citizens to report outages right from their phones.

Real-Time Rain Data Available

CoCoRaHS – the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network – is giving citizens all over the country a clearer, more precise picture of the precipitation taking place in their local communities. This grassroots network goes beyond general weather reporting and maps out specific, real-time precipitation data submitted by trained volunteers all over the community, which comes in handy when a downpour is blanketing one neighborhood while the sun shines brightly just a few streets over.

To get precipitation data for your area, visit www.cocorahs.org.

Stormwater Tips to Protect our Water Resources

Summer officially started June 21, and it is time for fun in the sun. With more adventures outside, here are a few reminders on how to enjoy your summer while protecting our water resources:

PETS: Animals love the outdoors, just as we do. Plan ahead and bring bags to pick up your pet's waste to help keep our local streams and ponds clean.

POOLS: Swimming is a great way to cool off and get some exercise, but pool water can pollute local streams if discharged improperly. For example, chlorine can be harmful to fish and other aquatic life, so make sure that water is de-chlorinated before being discharged from the pool.

TRASH: Whether you are fishing, playing at a park or enjoying a ball game, be sure to dispose of trash properly to keep our environment healthy and community beautiful.

Remember, only rain goes down the storm drain! For more information, contact the Stormwater Division at (229) 259-3530.

