

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 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: Thomas McIntyre, Andy Gibbs, Sandra Tooley, Tim Carroll, Nick Harden, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Eric Howard was absent. The invocation was given by Councilman Tim Carroll, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS

Special Presentation of the 2023 Greater Valdosta Christmas Parade Winners.

The 2023 Greater Valdosta Community Christmas Parade was held on Friday, December 8, 2023. Sponsors for the event were the Ossipe Temple #65, the City of Valdosta, Coca Cola, and Wild Adventures Theme Park. This year's theme was "Snow Globes." The Judges for the Float entries this year were Tiffany Bentley, Terri Ball, and Hope Brown. The announcer was Mayor Scott James Matheson. The Float entries were judged on Originality, Details/Neatness, Artistic Design, and Theme Use. Trophies will be awarded to the top three winners based on their overall scores. The Parade winners were as follows: Third Place – Home Depot, Second Place – SAFT, and First Place – Langdale Fuel Company. The proceeds raised by Ossipe Temple #65 through parade entry fees were donated to various charities.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Regular Meeting held on December, 2023 were approved by unanimous consent (6-0) of the Council.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

RESOLUTION NO. 2024-2, A RESOLUTION TO APPROVE A LOAN FROM THE GEORGIA ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE AUTHORITY (GEFA) FOR THE COMPLETION OF A LEAD SERVICE LINE INVENTORY

Consideration of a Resolution to approve a loan from the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) for the completion of a Lead Service Line Inventory.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that this is a new loan from the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) for the purpose of completing an inventory of lead service lines in the City's utility system. The City of Valdosta is requesting funding from GEFA in the amount of \$250,000 in order to complete work on the Lead Service Line Inventory required by the State of Georgia under the revised Environmental Protection Division (EPD) Lead and Copper Rule effective November 30, 2023. GEFA has agreed to extend a \$250,000 loan at 0%. GEFA requires a Promissory Note, Legal Opinion of Borrowers Counsel, and a City Council Resolution agreeing to the loan. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the Resolution authorizing a loan in the amount of \$250,000 from the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) for the completion of a Lead Service Line Inventory.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to enact Resolution No. 2024-2, a Resolution authorizing a loan in the amount of \$250,000 from the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) for the completion of a Lead Service Line Inventory, the complete text of which will be found in Resolution Book VII.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for a Rear Loader Refuse Truck for the Public Works Department (Bid No. 11-23-24).

Larry Ogden, Public Works Director, stated that the Public Works Department needs to purchase a new Rear Loader Refuse Truck due to the age and serviceability of an existing truck. The truck is used for running a commercial route for emptying small business trash cans throughout the City. The new vehicle will replace Line Item #2508 which is a 1999 model Rear Loader Refuse Truck. This purchase is in the Council-approved Budget for the current Fiscal Year. Two sealed bids were received on January 2, 2024 from Solid Waste Applied Technologies (SWAT) with one of those bids being submitted for Container Systems located in Daytona Beach, Florida in the amount of \$316,683.04 because Container Systems did not have access to a compaction body that met our specifications. The low bid submitted was by SWAT in the amount of \$299,849. Several other vendors did not respond to the invitation to bid due to lack of allocation across the industry. Larry Ogden, Public Works Director, recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by Solid Waste Applied Technologies in the amount of \$299.849 for a Rear Loader Refuse Truck for the Public Works Department.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the low bid submitted by Solid Waste Applied Technologies in the amount of \$299.849 for a Rear Loader Refuse Truck for the Public Works Department.

Consideration of bids for a Towing/Dump Truck for the Public Works Department (Bid No. 12-23-24).

Larry Ogden, Public Works Director, stated that the Public Works Department needs to purchase a new Towing/Dump Truck due to the age and serviceability of an existing Towing Truck. The truck is used for towing and dumping swaycar trailers. The new vehicle will replace Line Item #2114 which is a 2008 model Towing Truck. This purchase is in the Council-approved Budget for the current Fiscal Year. Three sealed bids were received on January 2, 2024 with the low bid submitted by Four-Star Freightliner in the amount of \$128,433. Larry Ogden, Public Works Director, recommended that Council approve the bid submitted by Four Star Freightliner in the amount of \$128,433 for a Towing/Dump Truck for the Public Works Department.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilwoman Tooley, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the low bid submitted by Four Star Freightliner in the amount of \$128,433 for a Towing/Dump Truck for the Public Works Department.

Consideration of a request to approve the Professional Design Services Agreement for the Lakeland Avenue Regional Stormwater Facility.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that the City developed a comprehensive City-wide stormwater system analysis and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) following the 2009 storm event and has implemented that CIP as funding is available. The Lakeland Avenue Regional Stormwater Facility (RSF) is a component of that CIP. Land acquisition for this Facility is complete, and the next step is design. A professional Engineering Consultant is required for this work. On an annual basis, the City Engineering Department has developed a list of qualified professional services firms through solicitation of Statements of Qualification for designs of water distribution, sanitary sewer, wastewater collection and treatment, stormwater, sidewalk construction, street revisions, transportation studies, land surveying and other miscellaneous tasks. The firms in the library can provide professional services to the City when the need arises and the firm is available and qualified. LEA is in our 2023/2024 library and is qualified to perform this scope of design services. The LEA Design Services Proposal is attached and totals \$146,250. The work includes Surveying, Environmental Services (State and Federal Agency permits), and Design as needed to prepare construction plans and documents for the construction of the RSF. The general scope of design will be for: (1) Dredging of the existing channel of One Mile Branch, (2) Construction of a 1.25-acre regional stormwater pond to the west of One Mile Branch, (3) Construction of a 0.5-acre stormwater pond behind the Senior Center, (4) Stormwater drainage improvements along Lakeland Avenue including curb and gutter, storm pipes, and sidewalks, and (5) Rerouting sanitary sewer along Melrose Drive. Upon Council approval, the Design Consultant will be engaged, and upon completion of their work, the Construction Project will be advertised for competitive bidding. Those bids will be presented to Council for consideration to complete this RSF Project. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve Professional Design Services Agreement submitted by LEA in the amount of \$146,250 for the Lakeland Avenue Regional Stormwater Facility.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Tooley, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the Professional Design Services Agreement submitted by LEA in the amount of \$146,250 for the

Lakeland Avenue Regional Stormwater Facility.

Consideration of bids for Phase 2 (Well Drilling) of Production Wells No. 1 and No. 2 for the new Water Treatment Plant.

Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, stated that the CDM Smith, Consultant, assisted the City in 2021 to apply and receive Georgia American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for a new Water Treatment Plant (WTP). In early 2023, Phase 1 (Test Well) was completed and the City acquired a new property for the Project site. Under Phase 2, the Consultant is continuing to support the City with Professional Engineering Services on the Project for design, permitting, assistance during bidding, and engineering services during construction. The initial drilling design package of two upper Floridan Aquifer Wells for the new WTP was completed in November, 2023. The early Phase 2 design work (well drilling) of the Project was bid out in December, 2023 and bids were opened publicly on January 4, 2024. This Project is the overall alternative water supply program under the secured State Fiscal Recovery Funds for Phase 2 and has been on-going since August, 2023. The need for completing the well drilling portion in advance of design finishing is required to verify design parameters and water quality prior to finishing design and be shovel-ready for construction of above-ground well facility features once remaining construction work for the WTP is awarded at the end of Quarter 3 of 2024. The bids received on the Project were as follows: (1) AC Schultes of Florida, Inc. (dba Rowe Drilling) - \$1,373,040, (2) Grosch Drilling Enterprises, Inc. - \$1,556,486, and (3) Complete Services Well Drilling, Inc. - \$1,557,800. After the City's evaluation of bids, Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, recommended authorization to approve the award for the lowest, responsive and eligible bidder, AC Schultes of Florida, Inc. (dba Rowe Drilling) in the amount of \$1,373,040. Jason Barnes stated that after they looked at the marketing for these wells before it went out to bid, the market came out at approximately \$2 million. We have actually saved with Rowe Drilling over \$600,000 on this Project. When they also called for references, Rowe Drilling had 20 years of experience, Grosch Drilling Enterprises, Inc. had 90 years of service, and Complete Services Well Drilling, Inc. had 44 years. We had a variety of everybody and we feel good about the Project. Mayor Matheson thanked Jason Barnes, Assistant Director of Utilities, for saving the City money because they got us on the land purchase.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody inquired as to whether we have a warranty, if we are bonded, and if this is the same location near the Valdosta Regional Airport. Jason Barnes stated that we have a warranty, we are bonded, and that is the correct location. They checked all of this prior because if AC Schultes of Florida, Inc. (Rowe Drilling) was not, then they went to the next company to make sure they had everything they needed in line.

Councilman Harden inquired as to whether the funds for this have already been allocated from ARPA. Jason Barnes stated that was correct. Mayor Matheson also stated that it has a pretty tight timeline.

Councilman McIntyre inquired about the difference in the bid and the market of \$2 million. Jason Barnes stated that they made sure that Rowe Drilling had everything in line, they called references, and they received good feedback. They have done work for us before on Well No. 4 approximately 10 or 15 years ago at the existing Water Plant. They did a good job back then. Councilman McIntyre stated that he was a little skeptical about the difference in the bid and the market. Jason Barnes stated that the same package went out to everyone and there was no difference. They knew what they were going to get so we should be good. He feels confident.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody inquired about the warranty. Jason Barnes stated that we usually have four to five years on these production wells which is what we have had in the past. That covers the pump and some other things so we should have a good warranty on them.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the bid submitted by AC Schultes of Florida, Inc. (dba Rowe Drilling) in the amount of \$1,373,040 for Phase 2 (Well Drilling) of Production Wells No. 1 and No. 2 for the new Water Treatment Plant.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request to purchase and install a new Micro Screen at the Mud Creek Water Pollution Control Plant.

Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, stated that the influent wet well has been in service since 1977 with upgrades and replacements made in 1986 and 2011. The influent micro screen is a filter that removes big solid objects from the wastewater. It is a type of screen that takes out rags, plastics, papers, metals, etc., from any flowing water. As the name implies, it usually consists of vertical steel bars spaced 1 to 2 millimeters apart. There are other screens and treatments that follow to remove other pollutants. By removing the large solids, we can prevent damage and unnecessary wear and tear which reduces maintenance needs and potential issues for the whole system. The removal of large solids also minimizes interferences in the whole treatment process. For instance, it prevents clogging and contamination of the waterways. Currently there is no micro screen in use at the Mud Creek Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP). There are only two Bar Screens with a 3 to 6 millimeter spacing which do not adequately remove material from the waste stream for the current treatment and future treatment process as set forth by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) in the City's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. With the addition of this micro screen, the City will remove a higher quantity of material that would interfere with the downstream treatment processes. Removal rates would increase by fifty percent over the current screening systems in place at this time. Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve this sole source purchase from Cornerstone H2O for the micro screen in the amount of \$252,900.

A MOTION by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the sole source purchase from Cornerstone H2O in the amount of \$252,900 for the installation of a new Micro Screen at the Mud Creek Water Pollution Control Plant.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Kelly Saxton, Valdosta, stated that she is coming before the Mayor and Council to discuss the warming shelter. Their homeless shelters remain full and a plan is in place to refer people to the shelters during bad weather is not a reliable option. We need a true plan in place for inclement weather. Moultrie, Quitman, and Thomasville, just to name a few, have something in place for 29 degree weather. Our current Emergency Plan seems to center more towards pets, plants, and pipes. Sometimes in advocating for the well being of people in need, we feel like red-headed step-children. We need your help. When they came to the Council about the Soup Kitchen closure, they had a meeting and the City Manager and Assistant City Manager came down and helped them in the Soup Kitchen. They donated items out of their own pockets which was greatly appreciated. Councilman Harden, even before he even became a Councilman, had supported the Soup Kitchen before it closed. Ms. Saxton also thanked the City for their sponsorship of the Stomp Out Homelessness Event. She also came before Council concerning some employment issues and the credentials needed for employment. You all have fixed that as of January 1, 2024. That is also very much appreciated. They had the Point in Time Count last week and under the direction of Anetra Riley, Neighborhood Development & Community Protection Manager, and her Staff, they helped them to count and meet the needs of people in our community. They still have more issues to tackle and work to do. We all know that Rome was not built in a day, but we do know that if we do nothing, it would never be built. She appreciates Council not being a big bad wolf government and the open door policy with no barriers to citizens who want to be heard. She appreciated the Mayor and Council letting her speak today.

Louis Gordon, 2 Shanna Circle, stated that last year, they assisted Valdosta State University students who were living in Blanton Commons. They had come under new management and the students at the beginning of the year got very short notice that they would basically be kicked out. They worked with the Tenants Union and tried to talk to the Management there for decreasing some of the fees because if they were going to have to find another place to go they could not pay the extra fees to move out really quickly. They were also dealing with living conditions that were not suitable for them. We do have an issue with homelessness and one of those groups right now are college students. The cost of college is insurmountable now. Most people going to college now will never get rid of their student loan debt. Two of our biggest draws here in Valdosta is the military base and the college. A lot of the business owners here know that in order to sustain their business here in Valdosta you have to be able to deal with the military, college, and the at-home population. He thinks that we can do a lot in taking care of these students. We should not have such a large population of homeless college students. The last time he checked it was approximately 900 college students. He asked that they think about the barriers to learning that it creates and the lasting stain that it creates when we attach that to Valdosta's name. He does appreciate the analogy of Rome not being built in a day. He was an Art Major and he loved Art History. Rome was founded by Romulus and Remus who were nurtured by a "she-wolf." The Roman people carried that into the way that they handled

business. We need to be as aggressive as that kind of spirit in handling these problems. Think about what it feels like if you are a college student who is homeless and trying to deal with student loans, where your next meal is coming from, and where you are going to lay their head at night. They need an advocate and we have enough people here who care about these kids to come together and solve this issue.

Bill Love, 2207 Azalea Drive, congratulated Councilman Nick Harden on being elected as the City Councilman At-Large. Mr. Love stated that he wanted to talk about the Police Department. We do not have enough Police Officers. We are not making enough effort to make ourselves safe in this community. We are hearing shots every night on Deborah Drive. He used to live on Deborah Drive and he sold that house; however, he still has friends that he grew up with whose mothers still live there. They hear shots every night. It was reported to him that our Police Department are dumbing down the Codes that they report to the GBI. He does not know if that is a fact or not but we need to get accurate reporting on what our Police Department is doing. He does not blame anyone in the Police Department. This has reached your level. Councilman Harden gets a pass on this one. The other Council Members have been here and we had a problem and no one has addressed it to the satisfaction of anybody. In fact, it may have gotten worse. When we do the same thing we have been doing for two years and take their \$15 and go do an interview, and we still don't have enough Offices, then that is not working. He does not know how you change it or what you do but he can find out. To say that Lowndes County Sheriff's Department is stealing our people is not true either. He has talked to those guys and they come over freely so that is not a problem. What he would like to see happen is an Exit Interview from a private source when somebody in the Police Department quits. We are not doing that though. We need to find out where the problem is because we need a Police force. Deaths are starting to rise and shots are starting to rise. He saw three kids riding down the sidewalk on motorcycles as he was coming to the Council Meeting tonight. They passed two Police cars and they did not turn around and go get them. They just let them go. These were not the little scooters. These were the regular dirt bikes. He has gone to the GBI and put in a request for information. He will be back as it takes six to eight weeks. He wants to see what the total number of reports were last year. He would like for everyone to work together to make our community safe. We have to make our community safe. If this is not number one on your list it should be. It could be your child that gets shot like the young girl in Remerton.

George Boston Rhynes, 5004 Oak Drive, stated that he is under an 11 year criminal trespass by the Lowndes County Sheriff's Department and the Lowndes County School System and nobody will remove him in writing. That was after Kendrick Johnson's death. It was as if they did not want him recording those kids who may have wanted to speak to him. On Wednesday of this week when the Liberty Theater was torn down, he was recording and a Code Enforcer came and told him that he had to move or he would call the Police. He explained to the Code Enforcer that he does this all across the State and America and he was very familiar with the law. He told the Code Enforcer that there was no tape there down the sidewalk and they only had the street saying it was closed. He told him that he respected that and that was why he did not drive his vehicle. There was nothing to divide the sidewalk and sidewalks to him are open to the public. He knows that they have previously put out signs says "Sidewalk Closed" because he has seen them. The Police Officer came by and he explained to the Officer and he was cordial and stated that it made sense to him. The Code Enforcer, who was black, called another set of Police Officers and two more came. He told them that he was ready to be arrested and that he would sue. To make a long story short, it wasn't too long before the second set of Officers took the Crime Scene tape and taped it to the building so nobody could go across the sidewalk. That is what they should have done in the first place. They just made a correction that he could see. He was trying to tell the Code Enforcer that there were people next to the building. He has that on video. He told the Code Enforcer that he did not say anything to those people. He agrees with Mr. Love in that there is a great possibility that we need more training or something in our Police Department. What makes him so sick at night is that he has not seen a city yet with so many cars driving with their headlights out at night. If you haven't seen it then you will hear about it when there is an accident.

Anthony Fudge, 2104 Pin Oak Circle, stated that he is the recipient of most of the rain and floodwater that comes to Lakeland Avenue. He is about three houses from the Fire Station and since the year 2000, he keeps about 40-50 pounds of sandbags in his yard to put out when there is a heavy rain. He is getting a little older and his elbows and shoulders are not working that good any more to be picking up those sandbags. Hopefully, the retention pond that they are putting on Lakeland Avenue will help. It was not just the hurricane but his house has flooded three times. When the hurricane hit, his house had 22 inches of water on the inside and his neighbor who shares a fence had none. Years before the new City Annex was built, he came to City and asked about the permit for the foundation of his home. He was told that it was 28 inches too low. He requested the information again

about three weeks ago and nobody knows where it is at. Hopefully, the retention pond will work. He cannot keep lifting the sandbags.

John Quarterman, 3338 Country Club Road, Suite L, stated that while he agrees with the City Engineer's approach in trying to stop trash before it gets into the creeks, the water goats cost far less than even the engineering preparation that he is talking about. He thoroughly agrees with the project as it is well needed in that location and it may do a lot to solve the on-going difficulties of trash getting into One Mile Branch and some of the sewage spills because of the flooding and of course, some of the flooding itself. His point is that a few more water goats downstream on some of the creeks such as at a location on Three Mile Branch, would also be a good thing. He would like to commend the City Marshals for helping to keep litter out of the creeks. They have been notifying parking lot owners and citing them, if necessary, about not having trash cans and about letting trash get off their properties which the City Ordinance says they should not do. We are seeing some results because there are parking lots where trash cans are popping up. He commends the City Marshals for starting the process and having some results. The last time he looked at the Five Points Parking lot which is owned by the City he did not see any trash cans. Also, on St. Augustine Road in the parking lot by Hightower Creek where he took a video of the Mayor in December of 2023, looking at where people stop and throw out their fast food because there was no trash can, the Ordinance says the trash cans must be strategically placed. It would be nice after a year and counting to have some trash cans down there. He also commended the City Engineer for the project he is working on and many others and the Utilities Director. There seems to be fewer spills, they are stopped faster, and they are getting reported better. He just wanted to compliment the City of Valdosta. Also, the Mayor and Chairman's Paddle will be held on March 2, 2024 starting at the Langdale Park boat ramp going to the Troupville boat ramp.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that the Young Game Changers Steering Committee will be meeting on February 1, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. at The Woman's Building. Also, on February 1st, the Love Your Downtown Campaign begins. On February 3, 2024 from 12:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., the Second Annual Big Game Bash with Pepsi will be held at Unity Park. On February 5, 2024 at 11:00 a.m., there will be a National Burn Awareness Week Proclamation presentation at Fire Station 1. On February 7, 2024 at 10:00 a.m., there will be a Groundbreaking Ceremony for Harvest Station at 401 Griffin Avenue. On February 14, 2024 at 11:00 a.m., there will be an Employee Appreciation Luncheon at 1901 Barack Obama Boulevard. On February 15, 2024 at 10:00 a.m., there will be an Arbor Day Proclamation Event at Sunset Hill Cemetery.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mayor Matheson stated that on February 15, 2024 at 11:30 a.m., there will be a rededication of Southside Library which has almost doubled in scope, scale, and size. It was much needed and it has a new Cultural Center on Griffin Avenue. It was a fantastic project that was an all-in project from our State Senators to our City Staff and the fantastic Board and Friends of the Library. Also, the Cities United Summit will be held on January 26-29, 2024 in Atlanta. He will be coming back on Saturday to represent the Council at a Military Funeral for U. S. Master Sgt. Roy E. Barrow at 2:00 p.m. at the McLane Riverview Memorial Gardens Pavilion. In 1950, Sgt. Barrow left for the Korean War and has been he has been Missing in Action since that time. His remains were just identified and brought back home to Valdosta. He will be honored in our City forever more and he will be remembered for his service to God and Country.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that she was asking for assistance with placing cameras in the City of Valdosta. Some of the housing areas have cameras up but they are not on. Some of the shooting that is being done in her District is every night. You can hear them in your house. At one time they had a camera at the Ora Lee West area that would pull in views from Brookwood and Jane Street if anything was happening in that area. She would also like to have some cameras in the Ponderosa Drive area. Hudson Docket also has cameras but they are not connected. Councilwoman Miller-Cody asked if the City Manager could look into that to see what could be done to get the cameras back up to speed. This would help Police Chief Manahan to see who is doing some of this shooting. They are shooting every night in her District as well as on the southside.

Councilman Harden stated that he has had some citizens reach out to him and he has received numerous E-mails regarding shootings. This has been going on for a while and he would like to see some lights in some of the darker areas.

Councilman McIntyre stated that three years ago there was a problem in one of the dark areas and someone was raped. He requested that solar lights be put up because they are less expensive.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Harden, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to adjourn the January 25, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:35 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, February 8, 2024.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta