

**MINUTES**  
**MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL**  
**5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 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, Andy Gibbs, Tim Carroll, Nick Harden, and Vivian Miller-Cody. Councilman Thomas McIntyre and Councilwoman Sandra Tooley were absent. The invocation was given by Boy Scout Troop 491 of St. John Catholic Church, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

**AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS**

Consideration of the March, 2024 Employee of the Month Award (School Resource Officer Devonta Battle, Valdosta Police Department).

Police Chief Leslie Manahan stated that School Resource Officer Devonta Battle has been employed by the City of Valdosta since 2015 and has been assigned as a School Resource Officer at Valdosta High School since 2017. Officer Battle is a graduate of Valdosta High School Class of 2012, and he takes pride in his Alma Mater and stays involved with his former school. Officer Battle continues to perform exemplary work while at the High School but also understands the importance of mentoring our future leaders. Recently, Officer Battle created a Scholarship Program for Senior Class students at Valdosta High School. Officer Battle took it upon himself to create this Scholarship which is called the "Devonta Battle Financial Literacy Scholarship." Officer Battle allows all Seniors to apply for the scholarship to include students at VECA and Horne Learning Center. Officer Battle provides the application packet which is located in the Guidance Department of the High School. Officer Battle provides the winner of the scholarship with \$500.00 of his own personal funding. Officer Battle first started the Program last year and stated that four other donors matched his Program. A total of five students were awarded Scholarships at the Valdosta City Schools Honors Night receiving \$500.00 each. Officer Battle truly understands how difficult it can be to be burdened with financial concerns after graduation and he should be recognized for this selfless act of kindness. Officer Battle, through his initiative to step forward, has been instrumental with other donors following his lead to assist students with their college career. Officer Battle has represented the Valdosta Police Department, the City of Valdosta, and Valdosta High School with the utmost professionalism and altruism. Office Battle continues to work closely with the future leaders of our community and his ability to help shape that future should not go unnoticed.

Special Recognition of the 2023 Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce Most Valuable Employee Finalist.

Jennie Boyer, Human Resources Director, stated that Kassie Davis, Human Resources Assistant, was recently recognized as a Finalist for the 2023 Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce Most Valuable Employee Award. Kassie began her career with the City of Valdosta in January of 2023, and quickly began to make her mark on the Department and on the City. Kassie is engaged, proactive, committed, and forward thinking. She sees a problem and finds a solution. She sees an opportunity and seeks to embrace it. In her short tenure, Kassie has tackled the reorganization of employee files, completed many document full audits, and proposed (and implemented) increased planning processes for efficiency and ease of execution. Kassie has taken the initiative to seek out additional ways in which she can contribute to the Department beyond those outlined in her official job description. As Kassie astutely remarked one day "Everyone needs a Kassie." We are honored that her achievements are recognized outside of the City of Valdosta and congratulate her on being named a 2023 Chamber of Commerce Most Valuable Employee finalist.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the Regular Meetings held on January 25, 2024 and February 8, 2024 were approved by unanimous consent (5-0) of the Council.

**ORDINANCE NO. 2024-5, AN ORDINANCE TO REZONE 9.89 ACRES FROM SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (R-15) TO A COMBINATION OF SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (R-10) AND SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (R-6)**

Consideration of an Ordinance to rezone 9.89 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-15) to a combination of Single-Family Residential (R-10) and Single Family Residential (R-6) as requested by Trevor Shaw (File No. VA-2024-02). The subject properties are located at 3305 and 3317 Cherry Creek Road. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their February 26, 2024 Regular Meeting and recommended approval (6-0 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning Director, stated that Trevor Shaw is requesting to rezone a total of 9.89 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-15) to a combination of Single-Family Residential (R-10) [4.18 acres], and Single Family Residential (R-6) [5.71 acres]. The properties are located at 3305 and 3317 Cherry Creek Road, which are along the west side of the road about 300 feet south of the intersection with Breckenridge Drive. This is also directly west of the traffic light intersection with North Oak Street Extension. Each parcel currently contains a single-family residence. The applicant is proposing to demolish both residences, combine the properties together, and then replat and redevelop the total property as a conventional single-family residential subdivision on public streets and lot sizes based on the proposed R-10 and R-6 Zoning pattern. The R-10 portion of the development would have about 14 lots, and the R-6 portion about 20 lots (about 34 lots total). The property is located within an Established Residential (ER) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan which allows the possibility of both R-10 and R-6 zoning. The properties are the last remnants of a semi-rural estate subdivision with 5-acre lots along North Oak Street Extension and Cherry Creek Road, which was first developed more than 60 years ago. Over the past 35+ years in response to growth pressures along these road corridors, all of these lots have been redeveloping into higher density residential subdivisions as well as small office parks. Individual houses on five-acre lots is no longer consistent with the surrounding land use, nor zoning patterns of the area. This request is a classic example of proposed "infill development of a residential nature; however, the challenge in this case is how to balance or mitigate the existing pattern of low density residential on one side, and relatively higher density development on the other. The Windsor Park and Windsor-2 neighborhoods to the north and west are zoned R-15, while the Kingswood Subdivision to the south is zoned PRD with an R-6-like lot pattern. Also, to the south there is a vacant tract (1.7 acres) that is zoned R-P, which allows apartments or offices. To the east, through the street intersections is the Three Oaks Apartment complex. With this existing pattern of a graduated scale of density from one side of the property to the other, that applicant is proposing a transitional pattern of R-10 zoning next to the R-15, and regular R-6 Zoning next to the PRD and R-P development. These proposed zonings are consistent with the zoning and land use patterns for the overall area and serve as a transitional pattern between these opposing development densities. Another point to consider in all of this is that of development access. Although the property abuts the existing R-15 development area, it has no direct means of access connection to that other neighborhood; however, the PRD development to the south contains two stub-out streets into the subject property. By Code, development of the subject property is required to connect to this PRD development, unless a variance otherwise granted. Both the PRD development and the subject property each need more than one access connection to the City street system and connecting through each other satisfies this requirement for both. Developing the property entirely as an R-15 subdivision with frontage along this portion of Cherry Creek Road and mandated two points of connected access to existing R-6 density development, seems a little out of character with what should be a transitional pattern of infill development. Staff found the request for a combination of R-10 and R-6 zoning consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP) and recommended approval. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their February 26, 2024 meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP), and recommended approval of R-10 and R-6 split zoning as proposed (6-0 Vote).

Zachary Cowart, Attorney, spoke in favor of the request. Mr. Cowart stated that he represented Trevor Shaw, the Developer. There were a couple of questions that came up at the Planning Commission that he wanted to address. By developing the subdivision in the manner that is outlined, it would make the adjoining property safer due to the fact that fire trucks and ambulances have a hard time turning around in the more dense area below the proposed rezoning area. It is his understanding that the intent was for the two roads going into the subdivision to continue and be developed as housing. There was concern about additional traffic but they think it makes it safe for everyone involved. They requested the R-6 Zoning in the southern part due to the more dense Zoning at the bottom and the R-P Zoning which would actually allow apartments. Their proposal is for residential houses which would be 1,400 to 1,500 square feet.

Alyssa Noyes, 800 South Lakeshore Drive, spoke in opposition to the request. Ms. Noyes stated that it is her understanding that the lot could hold 24 houses and if it gets changed, it would increase to 34. They have some residents who live on Wesley Road who are very concerned about the infrastructure and traffic. They would like to know what the plan is for water and sewer. There was some flooding in that area and with the removal of all those trees it will only make it worse. If you travel down Cherry Creek Road toward Inner Perimeter Road, many times during the day, there is a backlog of traffic. She has not heard any plans for widening the road, a new traffic light, curbs, or sidewalks. She would also like to see some evidence about the safety aspect.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that there is a proposed TIA-2 Project to widen Oak Street Extension from a point just beyond to the north of this all the way to down to the terminus of Five Points renovation which is scheduled to occur this year. Councilman Carroll inquired as to whether those plans would include sidewalks and/or bike lanes. Ben O'Dowd stated that the design scope for the widening has not been dialed in yet and will probably be constrained by right-of-way limitations. All of our developments currently incorporate sidewalks on both sides of the road and he would push for that on this as it is an urban environment and high density residential in proximity to commercial properties such as restaurants and shopping.

Deborah Baker, 3523 Lenox Drive, spoke in opposition to the request. She has lived in this subdivision since its inception in 1994. As far as the safety issues, that is the key here. The subdivision coming out on Wesley Street has curb that is very dangerous. They have foliage that blocks the view, sidewalks that are not contiguous, and children leaving the neighborhood trying to catch a school bus. When you come from Cherry Creek to Inner Perimeter Road, there are a lot of hazards that people are not considering. As far as the Fire Department, Capt. Mack had a fire next door to him and there were approximately 20 vehicles in their neighborhood. They get in and out fine just like the school bus that picks up the special needs children that live in the neighborhood. Safety is key here. It was said that the houses would be 1,300 to 1,600 square feet, and they have up to 2,200 square foot houses in their neighborhood. When you start looking at the planning, they are concerned about the impact the smaller houses will have on the larger houses. The traffic light will not be able to handle the additional cars on that road. There are a lot of significant safety issues and that is why they are here tonight. The one factor no one has considered is the sun rising in the east and setting in the west. They leave in the morning driving into the sun and they come home in the evening driving into the sun.

Prafull Shah, 3534 Cherry Creek Road, spoke in opposition to the request. He sent an E-mail to the Mayor and Council Members about his main concern and that is traffic. On Oak St. Extension, the traffic is so bad several times a day that it goes bumper-to-bumper from the fork between Cherry Creek Road and Oak Street Extension to Ashley Street. He has lived here for over 45 years and he has seen tremendous growth; however, if you add 35 houses, the traffic will be even worse. Mr. Shah asked Council's consideration in not approving the request.

Marsha Alexander, 3450 Staten Plantation Road, spoke in opposition to the request. Ms. Alexander stated that the traffic in that area is horrendous. There are accidents and rear end collisions all the time. Her sister and her daughter live on Cherry Creek Road and sometimes they cannot get out of their driveways. When taking her grandson to school in the morning, the traffic is horrible. Sometimes she has to back-track to Lake Laurie and go around. It is dangerous all the way to Five Points. The traffic light they have there is not doing a very good job. Her main concern is the traffic flow. She does not see how any more traffic can be added to that area.

Charles Ellis, 4217 Fawnwood Way, stated that he does not live in the area but his children's doctor, Dr. Griner, has his office in the area. It is difficult getting in and out of that drive and adding more houses is going to increase the traffic.

**A MOTION** was made by Councilman Howard to approve an Ordinance to rezone 9.89 acres from Single-Family Residential (R-15) to a combination of Single-Family Residential (R-10) and Single Family Residential (R-6) for properties located at 3305 and 3317 Cherry Creek Road as requested by Trevor Shaw. Councilman Gibbs seconded the motion. The motion was adopted (3-2) with Councilman Carroll and Councilman Harden voting in opposition to enact Ordinance No. 2024-5, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

**ORDINANCE NO. 2024-6, AN ORDINANCE TO REZONE 26.66 ACRES FROM MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (R-21) (COUNTY) TO SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (R-15)(CITY)**

**03/07/24 CONTINUED**

Consideration of an Ordinance to rezone 26.66 acres from Medium Density Residential (R-21)(County) to Single-Family Residential (R-15)(City) as requested by Stateline Investment Management LLC (File No. VA-2024-03). The property is located at 4081 Mt. Zion Church Road. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their February 26, 2024 Regular Meeting and recommended approval (6-0 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning Director, stated that Stateline Investment Management LLC, represented by Jason Glas and Bobby Diaz, is requesting to rezone 26.66 acres from Medium-Density Residential (R-21)(County) to Single-Family Residential (R-15)(City). The property is located at 4081 Mt Zion Church Road, which is along the north side of the road, about 2,300 feet east of the intersection with Jaycee Shack Road and diagonally across from the intersection with Hayes Road. The applicant is also seeking annexation of the property, which is being reviewed concurrently under File No. VA-2024-04. The property currently contains a single-family residence. The applicant is proposing to demolish the residence and redevelop the entire property as a conventional single-family subdivision on public streets. The proposed subdivision will contain about 52 homes, a community open space area with pond & walking trails, a landscaped divided entrance from Mt. Zion Church Road, a landscaped and fenced non-encroachable buffer elsewhere along Mt. Zion Church Road, as well as an HOA with protective covenants. The property is located within a Suburban Area (SA) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan which allows the possibility of R-15 Zoning. The property was rezoned from R-1 to R-21 in 2021 and was proposed as a subdivision with half-acre lots; however, that development never materialized and the property has sat for three years while changing ownerships. The applicants (as new prospective buyers) are proposing to develop the subdivision with a little higher density and a more upscale design. Their proposal requires connection to a public water and sewer system, and the only reasonable availability for this is connection to the City of Valdosta utility system via the adjacent Knights Mill Subdivision. The surrounding land use pattern is mostly residential on one-acre-plus lots along the Mt. Zion Church Road corridor, with smaller lots in the Knights Mill subdivision to the north and west, as well as the Lauren Estates subdivision to the southeast. The surrounding zoning pattern is also reflective of this pattern, with mostly R-1 and R-A Zoning along Mt. Zion Church Road, R-15 in Knights Mill, and R-21 in Lauren Estates. This overall area is on a slow urbanizing trend and is developing with a residential land use pattern with higher density subdivisions building in from the west. The applicant's proposal for R-15 Zoning is identical to the adjacent Knights Mill Subdivision. It is also only slightly more dense than the existing R-21 Zoning and is a logical progression of the overall developing pattern of the area. Staff found the request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP) and recommended approval. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their February 26, 2024 Meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Standards for the Exercise of Zoning Power (SFEZP), and recommended approval (6-0 vote).

Bobby Diaz and Harrison Glas, Developers, spoke in favor of the request. They are proposing a new development on the property that will serve a continuing need for more single-family residential housing. They are going through a shortage right now and this development will complement the surrounding neighborhoods. The homes will range in size from 1,800 to 2,200 square feet with concrete siding. They will be building all of the 52 houses and the mailboxes will all be matching. The subdivision design will support families and child safety. There will be lighting and sidewalks for the residents. There will be a Homeowners Association as well as a playground for the children. The price range of the houses will be low to mid-\$300,000.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Howard, seconded Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2024-6, an Ordinance to rezone 26.66 acres from Medium Density Residential (R-21)(County) to Single-Family Residential (R-15)(City) for property located at 4081 Mt. Zion Church Road as requested by Stateline Investment Management LLC, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

**ORDINANCE NO. 2024-7, AN ORDINANCE TO ANNEX 26.66 ACRES INTO THE CITY OF VALDOSTA**

Consideration of an Ordinance to annex 26.66 acres into the City of Valdosta as requested by Stateline

Investment Management LLC (File No. VA-2024-04). The property is located at 4081 Mt. Zion Church Road. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their February 26, 2024 Regular Meeting and recommended approval (6-0 Vote).

Matt Martin, Planning Director, stated that Stateline Investment Management LLC, represented by Jason Glas and Bobby Diaz, is requesting to annex 26.66 acres into the City of Valdosta. The property is located at 4081 Mt Zion Church Road, which is along the north side of the road, about 2,300 feet east of the intersection with Jaycee Shack Road and diagonally across from the intersection with Hayes Road. The property currently contains a single-family residence. The applicant is proposing to redevelop the entire property as a conventional single-family subdivision with about 52 homes. The applicant is requesting annexation in order to receive City utilities and other City services to support the proposed development. Concurrent with the annexation, the applicant is also requesting Rezoning of the property (File No. VA-2024-03). The property is located within a Suburban Area (SA) Character Area on the Future Development Map of the Comprehensive Plan. There is currently no proposed change to this Character Area designation as a result of annexation. The property is contiguous to the existing Valdosta City Limits and it is fully eligible for annexation into Valdosta. This annexation request has been properly noticed to Lowndes County pursuant to State law and to date, there have been no land use disputes raised by the County as part of the request. The applicant’s proposal for an all-residential development fits in well with both the zoning and development patterns of the area, and the City of Valdosta is currently the only nearby provider of sufficient water/sewer services necessary to accommodate the scope of this development. Staff found the annexation request consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and recommended approval. The Planning Commission reviewed this at their February 26, 2024 meeting, found it consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and recommended approval of the annexation (6-0 vote).

No one spoke in favor of the request.

No one spoke in opposition to the request.

**A MOTION** by Councilman Harden, seconded Councilman Howard, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to enact Ordinance No. 2024-7, an Ordinance to annex 26.66 acres for property located at 4081 Mt. Zion Church Road into the City of Valdosta as requested by Stateline Investment Management LLC, the complete text of which will be found in Ordinance Book XIV.

**ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS**

**RESOLUTION NO. 2024-4, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR TO EXECUTE AN AGREEMENT WITH THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (GDOT) FOR THE 5307 FUNDING OF THE CITY OF VALDOSTA ON-DEMAND TRANSIT SYSTEM**

Consideration of a Resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute an Agreement with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) for the 5307 Funding of the City of Valdosta On-Demand Transit System.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that the City operates a successful On Demand Transit System to meet the transportation needs of its citizens. The system has relied on the Federal 5307 Grant for most of its funding since its inception and will continue to do so the current Fiscal Year. The 5307 Program in Georgia is administered by the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) meaning that the City receives the funding as a subrecipient of GDOT. GDOT requires all 5307 subrecipients to sign a Contract stating that the transit system being funded will be operated in accordance with FTA and GDOT requirements. The Contract specifies the subrecipient’s operational responsibilities and GDOT’s fiscal obligations for fiscal year 2024. The attached Agreement was prepared by GDOT and outlines the funding of Valdosta on Demand. It requires the City follow all rules and guidelines set by GDOT to ensure program compliance and allocates \$1,455,529 of Federal Funding and \$90,971 of State funding to the City for the operation of Valdosta on Demand. The total cost of the program covered by the Contract is \$2,244,776, leaving a local obligation of \$698,276. A Resolution has been prepared authorizing the Mayor to sign the GDOT Agreement for 5307 Funding. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the Resolution authorizing the Mayor to sign the GDOT Agreement for 5307 Funding.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to enact Resolution No. 2024-4, a Resolution authorizing the Mayor to execute an Agreement with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) for the 5307 Funding of the City of Valdosta On-Demand Transit System, the complete text of which will be found in Resolution Book VII.

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

Consideration of bids for the repair of a Caterpillar Compactor for the Public Works Department.

Larry Ogden, Public Works Director, stated that the Public Works Department needs to move forward with repairs to a 1993 Caterpillar Compactor. The steel-wheeled compactor is used at the Compost Site for daily moving and compacting yard debris. The Caterpillar-certified engine change will accompany a 5-year, 6000-hour warranty. This repair aligns with the Council-approved Budget (Motor Pool/Sub-Let Labor Repairs - \$103,000 Remaining) for the current Fiscal Year. A single source bid in the amount of \$70,999.29 was received from Yancey Caterpillar on January 5, 2024. Larry Ogden, Public Works Director, recommended that Council approve the bid submitted by Yancey Caterpillar in the amount of \$70,999.29 and allow the Public Works Department to move forward with the repairs.

A **MOTION** by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the bid submitted by Yancey Caterpillar in the amount of \$70,999.29 and allow the Public Works Department to proceed with repairs to the Caterpillar Compactor.

Consideration of bids for Stormwater Improvements to the street drainage system located at Oakdale Drive and Sherwood Drive.

Ben O’Dowd, City Engineer, stated that the City performs annual maintenance on the stormwater drainage system through contracting of pipe, culvert, and structure replacement and repair work. Funding for this work is from both the City’s Stormwater Utility User Fees as well as budgeted funds from SPLOST VIII. The corrugated metal pipe system for the street drainage system at Oakdale Drive and Sherwood Drive has been in place for nearly 50 years and is at the end of its functional life due to corrosion. The large diameter (48”) outfall pipe and the three catch basins at the intersection have been identified for replacement this fiscal year. There were four local construction firms at the pre-bid meeting held 02/13/2024, and one bid was received and opened at 2:00 p.m. on 2/22/2024. The bid was considered both responsive and responsible. The low bid was submitted by Southland Contractors, Inc., in the amount of \$322,866.25 (which included a correction in the number of head walls from two to one. By adding a 10% contingency (\$32,286.63) for unknown field conditions, this would bring the total Project Cost to \$355,152.88. Staff recommends using combined funding to accomplish this Project with \$275,000 coming from the Stormwater Utility Enterprise Fund, and \$80,152.88 from SPLOST VIII Stormwater Pipe Replacement Funding. Ben O’Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the low bid submitted by Southland Contractors, Inc. in the amount of \$322,866.25 plus a 10% contingency (\$32,286.63) for a total Project cost of \$355,152.88 for Stormwater Improvements to the street drainage system located at Oakdale Drive and Sherwood Drive.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the bid submitted by Southland Contractors, Inc. in the amount of \$322,866.25 plus a 10% contingency (\$32,286.63) for a total Project cost of \$355,152.88 for Stormwater Improvements to the street drainage system located at Oakdale Drive and Sherwood Drive.

**LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS**

Consideration of a request to approve payment for emergency repairs to a Sanitary Sewer Line near Knights Creek off of Highway 84 and Blanchard Street.

Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, stated that on February 16, 2023, a significant reduction in flow was detected at the Mud Creek Water Pollution Control Plant (WPCP). The Utilities Department Staff immediately commenced an investigation to identify the location of the system loss. A collapsed 21” diameter sanitary sewer trunkline was located near the intersection of Hwy. 84 and Blanchard Street on the southside of the CSX railroad.

The Utilities Department Staff selected RPI to perform any emergency repair work necessary to repair the deteriorated lines. The existing 21" ductile iron pipe was deteriorated due to sewer gases that corroded the top portion of the pipe. The ductile iron pipe has been a common problem of corrosion due to the sewer gases. The scope of work for this emergency repair are as follows: (1) Provide and maintain bypass, (2) Clear 20-30 ft. additional easement, (3) Provide and install +/- 803 linear feet 24-inch Standard Dimension Ratio (SDR) 26 gravity sewer main by method of open cut 14'-19' in depth, (4) Provide and install three each 6 ft. diameter manholes epoxy lined, and (5) Provide, install, and maintain dewatering. Jason Barnes, Assistant Utilities Director, recommended that Council approve payment to RPI in the amount of \$1,512,621 for the emergency repairs.

**A MOTION** by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to approve the approve payment to RPI in the amount of \$1,512,621 for the emergency repairs to a Sanitary Sewer Line near Knights Creek off of Highway 84 and Blanchard Street.

### **CITIZENS TO BE HEARD**

Louis Gordon, 2 Shanna Circle, stated that there was a recent meeting on housing assessments and since his office opened, they have heard a lot of horror stories about housing and what it is like to rent in Valdosta. Valdosta does not deserve that reputation. There are other resources that they need and a lot of community members do not know they are there or how to tap into them. He has a solution to that problem. He is proposing a Resource Fair. It is difficult for a lot of the people to get to participate in events outside of their community. They could use Vallotton Park, South Park, Saunders Park, and others. They could do voter registration, the Department of Public Health has a lot of things going on, LAMP, and many others; however, it does not seem they are coordinated as they could be to serve the citizens of the community.

Lula Lawson stated that she lives in a high crime area and it has become so bad that they have drugs, sale drugs, and drug houses. They harass her and they are known drug dealers. She cannot get anything done because she has no proof and no one will believe her. She has dealt with this problem for four years and nothing has been done yet. These guys are trying to do whatever they can to run her off. There is a lady and man down the street from her and they are trying to run them off. They need a camera in that area. They are trying to make people think she is crazy but this is really happening.

Steve Freeman, 612 Second Avenue, stated that he moved here from West Palm Beach, Florida and he has been here for three years. He has been complaining about a house that has been sitting there for a long time. They condemned the house which is located at 800 First Street. He has gotten complaints about people going up under the house to get inside of it. He asked Council if they could do something about it. He keeps coming back before Council with the same problem. His house was shut down when he bought his house which is 126 years old. They shut his house down but there is a house next door to him and the lady across the street is Ms. Blue who is 103 years old. She sits on her porch watching the same thing he is watching. There is another problem with the trash. He does not even know what to put out beside the road anymore. Every time you put something out they want to charge you. They tell you to put it out beside the road but then they charge it on your bill. He has a solution and that is to hire another Solid Waste Company and let them pick up the trash. On Magnolia Street, they fined one house but the trash is still sitting there. It is a nuisance to look at. You talk about cleaning the City up but there must be a problem somewhere. The guys are riding right by the trash. If there are certain days to pick up the trash then you may not know when to put it by the road. The City is charging him for everything he puts out on the road. That is a problem and he has had it ever since he moved here. They shut his house down twice because he cleaned the alley out. Councilman Harden inquired as to what he meant by saying they shut his house down. Mr. Freeman stated that there was an alley behind him that had a lot of trash and he cleaned it out. He put the trash by the road and they fined him. Then they shut his house down because there was an Ordinance or Codes about trash being put out. He had to come in and pay the fine and then they released the house so he could go back in it again.

Kristina Cheek, 104 East Mary Street, stated that she would like to propose some recognition and support from the City Council. Black women are three to four times more likely to die during pregnancy-related causes or during birth. The highest risk is during the post-partum period. One of the highest risks of maternal mortality are perinatal mood disorders which Black women suffer from at a very high rate. One in five to seven women will experience a post-partum mood disorder and men are affected by this as well. Women are also at a higher risk for morbidity such as pre-term birth, pre-eclampsia, pregnancy-induced hypertension, hemorrhage, cardio myopathy,

and undiagnosed perinatal mood disorders such as post-partum depression and anxiety. They suffer from high poverty rates and have inequitable care especially if they are poor and on Medicaid. Some of the issues they face that affect Black maternal health are issues with racism and stereotypes from Health Care providers. They are often not heard or listened to when they come in for their concerns, and because of that, they have high rates of health disparities. Maternal child health programs have been cut in our City and throughout the State. Home visiting and community health workers have been key in filling in those gaps. They also suffer from low breast feeding rates. One of the ways to reduce the incidence of infant mortality is to promote breast feeding. That can also reduce sleep-related incidences as well. Valdosta was formerly a hot spot for infant mortality but due to the efforts of community health workers and public health programs, it has been reduced to a warm spot and the rates have dropped. They are chronically affected by single-family households where they are led by women. She would like to ask that in the month of April, she can gain the support of City Council to recognize Black Maternal Health Week by a public proclamation. She is the founder of a budding non-profit called Sista Girl Birth Initiative and she would like to have Council's support in order to bring light to the community on these issues.

A concerned citizen stated that she would like to request the extension of a sidewalk near her home with a ramp for handicap accessibility. She lives near the intersection of Williams Street and Ann Street and the sidewalk comes down as far as the first lot at that intersection and then it becomes grass. There is no ramp to enable her daughter, who is in the Master's Program at Valdosta State University, to get to classes. She is nervous about going across the road because of people speeding. She would appreciate an extension of the sidewalk with a ramp.

Sementa Mathews, 4069 Conway Circle, thanked Council for their support of the Turner Center for the Arts. The Turner Center won a \$90,000 matching Grant for three years of free, live, outdoor music events. They are in year two and concerts will start on March 15, 2024. It is a great community building time because music draws people together from all walks of life. A lot of the people who are on the schedule this year are American Idol and The Voice winners. The Mayor and Council are also invited to the Music Appreciation Series which will be a duo violin group out of Miami and they are phenomenal. This weekend they will have a Broadway Show, Little Women, and it is the first time it has been released from Broadway in over ten years. It will be held at the Valdosta City Schools Performing Arts Center on Sunday, March 10, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. She would also like to invite the Mayor and Council to the Art of Writing Contest on Monday, March 18, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. at the Turner Center. There were over 140 children who entered poetry, non-fiction, and fiction works of Art. They are vying for \$2,500 in cash prizes. This is Youth Art Month and last Sunday they had over 2,134 people come through the Turner Center in a three-hour period. Last month, they had almost 5,000 people come through the Turner Center for the Arts.

Oscar Lee Griffith, Jr., 824 Sand Crane Circle, Lake Park, stated that he owns a house at 204 Youles Street in Valdosta. He has a problem with his trash not being picked up. Since October of 2023, he has called Public Works more than two times each month. He has spoken with the City Manager on the telephone and even came to talk to him. They will pick up his trash for one or two weeks and then the wheels fall off. He pays his bill but he cannot get his trash picked up. He should not have to take time out of his busy schedule to call Public Works to ask them to come pick up his trash. That is not his job. The Supervisor should have been notified and he should have come out to check on the issue. Somebody is not doing their job. It needs to be looked at. Happy wife, happy life. He does not need for his wife to go out there and look at the trash still sitting there and ask him why it has not been picked up. He does not work for the City but he pays his money and he should get the service that he pays for. He is pretty sure he is not the only one with this problem. There is a disconnect somewhere but it is not his job. He does not get paid to call the City about picking up the trash. He asked that the City fix the problem. The City has been taking his money for six months and he still has to call to get his trash picked up. That is unacceptable.

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

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that Azalea After Dark will be held on March 9, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Unity Park. The 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Pub Crawl will be held on March 9, 2024 in Downtown Valdosta starting at 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. with check-in at the Georgia Beer Company. Proceeds will benefit the Georgia Sheriffs Boys Ranch. On March 13, 2024, there will be a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony at the Mildred Hunter Center at 10:00 a.m. On March 15-16 2024, the Mayor and Council will hold the Strategic Initiatives Summit beginning at 7:30 a.m. at the Rainwater Conference Center. On March 23, 2024 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., there will be a



Community Road Cleanup starting at 1101 North Ashley Street. The area to be cleaned is Mary Street from North Ashley to North Troup Street. On April 19-20, 2024, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Bluesberry Festival will take place at Unity Park.

### COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Howard stated that our City is growing and with that growth there is going to be some growing pains. People are going to need housing. It was recently brought to his attention by a citizen that we do not need policing in our community; however, he just wanted to let that person know that we do need good policing. If that person wants to hear from our community then come talk to him and he can take you to the people in our community to let you know that we need good policing. We want a safe community just like anyone else. Please do not speak on behalf of our community if you have not talked to everyone in our community.

Councilman Harden stated that he is excited about the Retreat coming up. He also thanked Ms. Lula for speaking earlier under Citizens to be Heard. He has had conversations with her recently and they are going to try and address some of those issues. They have talked about policing and cameras and nobody wants Big Brother looking at you; however, people are not saying anything about what is going on in some of the neighborhoods. We have to do something. It is going to take the support of Council and community leaders. He is a new person on the Council but he will not stop until we get some things done. Our children are suffering because of some bad apples and we have to address that. He is going to continue to fight for that.

Councilwoman Miller-Cody stated that this is not the first time that they have mentioned the need for lighting in some areas. It has been brought up several times that lighting was needed in certain areas to protect the senior citizens and children. We need to all get on the same page and try to bring lighting in these areas. The Council cannot do it all by themselves and they do not have the funding for everything that is being asked for. They are going to have to ask the community to get involved with helping our senior citizens. In her area, if she sees it then she tells it. She tries to protect the senior citizens but she cannot protect them all. She knows Ms. Lula is telling the truth and she is not going to let anyone badger the Police Department because Chief Manahan is doing an outstanding job. She has called the Non-Emergency number and they have asked so many questions that people will not call them or they just hang up. By the time the Police Officers get to where you just told them to go, everything is over. That is the problem.

### ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilwoman Miller-Cody, was unanimously adopted (5-0) to adjourn the March 7, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 6:44 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, March 21, 2024.

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City Clerk, City of Valdosta

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Mayor, City of Valdosta