

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE VALDOSTA CITY COUNCIL
5:30 P.M., THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Scott James Matheson called the Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council to order at 5:30 p.m. Council members present were: Thomas McIntyre, Eric Howard, Sandra Tooley, Andy Gibbs, and Tim Carroll. Councilwoman Vivian Miller-Cody arrived late at 5:31 p.m. and Councilman Nick Harden arrived late at 5:39 p.m. The invocation was given by Councilman Andy Gibbs, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Regular Meetings held on November 21, 2024 and December 5, 2024 were approved by unanimous consent (6-0 Vote).

The minutes of the Regular Meeting held on December 19, 2024 are forthcoming.

BIDS, CONTRACTS, AGREEMENTS, AND EXPENDITURES

Consideration of bids for Advanced Meter Infrastructure (AMI) equipment and monitoring services for the City of Valdosta.

Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, stated that the City of Valdosta utilizes an AMI system to collect meter readings in the water/sewer system. The original Contractor, Smart Earth Technologies (SET), declared bankruptcy and is no longer in business. The City has been utilizing the services of Fenix Corporation which acquired the software developed by SET on an interim basis. The endpoints originally acquired from SET are failing and will need to be replaced in order for the water meters to transmit data to the system. The City is in need of a service and material provider to rehabilitate and maintain the system's AMI network. The City issued RFP 34-23-24 requesting proposals to replace the currently failed endpoints, and to contract to service the network and provide meters and endpoints for system maintenance and future expansion. The City received eight responsive bids and formed a Committee to evaluate the responses. The Committee consisted of Councilmen Andy Gibbs and Thomas McIntyre, City Manager Richard Hardy, Utilities Director Jason Barnes, City Engineer Ben O'Dowd, and Finance Director Chuck Dinkins. The Committee scored each response and the individual scores were aggregated and discussed by the Committee before the two finalists, Utility Solutions & Automation (USA) and Delta Municipal Supply, were selected for site visits. The site visits were made by Richard Hardy, Jason Barnes, Ben O'Dowd, Chuck Dinkins, and Meter Reading Superintendent Leo Warner. Both USA and Delta appeared to provide good solutions and were invited to make final presentations on December 17 and 18, 2024, respectively. After hearing both presentations, the Committee recommended Delta to receive the award. While both vendors appeared to offer a solid product, Delta offered a more tailored solution. Delta offers a hybrid solution utilizing both cellular endpoints and radio read endpoints. The radio reads are priced at \$184/unit and would be suitable in areas close to existing towers or substitutes (e.g., water tanks). Cellular endpoints are priced at \$222/unit but would be suitable in areas not under current radio coverage. Approximately 94.7% of the City's meters would be able to utilize radio read endpoints with the remainder needing a cellular device. The City would replace currently failed endpoints and continue to utilize the currently functioning endpoints in the interim. The rest of the system would be replaced through attrition over time. This vendor would also be able supply Neptune meters for system maintenance and future expansion. Cellular service for the endpoints would be \$5.95-\$7.80 annually depending on the strongest carrier for the location with no prepaid plans. Chuck Dinkins, Finance Director, recommended that Council approve the award of the bid to Delta Municipal Supply for the replacement of failed endpoints and ongoing system monitoring and supply.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Howard, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the bids as stated for Advanced Meter Infrastructure (AMI) equipment and monitoring services for the City of Valdosta.

Consideration of a request to purchase structural firefighting gear for the Valdosta Fire Department.

Deputy Fire Chief Marcus Haynes stated that the Fire Department would like to request the purchase of 30 sets (pants \$1,406.00 each and coats \$1,798.00 each) of gear from Ten-8 Fire & Safety Equipment of GA in the amount of \$96,120.00 utilizing the NPP.GOV National Contract that is utilized by government agencies across the nation. The gear has been deemed very reliable and it adheres to the standards of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 1971. It also has a ten year shelf life and warranty. The Fire Department currently has \$99,690 in their current year Budget to purchase structural firefighting gear so there would approximately \$3,000 in savings. Deputy Fire Chief Marcus Haynes recommended that Council approve the purchase of 30 sets (pants \$1,406.00 each and coats \$1,798.00 each) of gear from Ten-8 Fire & Safety Equipment of GA in the amount of \$96,120.00 utilizing the NPP.GOV National Contract.

A MOTION by Councilman Howard, seconded by Councilman McIntyre, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the purchase of 30 sets (pants \$1,406.00 each and coats \$1,798.00 each) of gear from Ten-8 Fire & Safety Equipment of GA in the amount of \$96,120.00 utilizing the NPP.GOV National Contract.

LOCAL FUNDING AND REQUESTS

Consideration of a request for the deletion of Chapter 328 - Landscape, Buffers, and Screening of the Land Development Regulations for the City of Valdosta. This request was tabled at the November 21, 2024 Regular Council Meeting until the January 9, 2025 Regular Council Meeting.

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion to take this request off the table.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to take the request for the deletion of Chapter 328 - Landscape, Buffers, and Screening of the Land Development Regulations for the City of Valdosta off the table.

Councilman Howard inquired as to whether they were going to table this request until the next Council Meeting. Councilman Carroll stated that it would be tabled until the second Council Meeting in February.

A MOTION by Councilman Gibbs, seconded by Councilman Carroll, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to table the request for the deletion of Chapter 328 - Landscape, Buffers, and Screening of the Land Development Regulations for the City of Valdosta to the February 20, 2025 Regular Meeting.

Consideration of a request to approve the submission of a Grant Application to the 2025 Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB) for road and bridge repairs in the City of Valdosta.

Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) assists Cities and Counties by awarding low-interest loans and grants for transportation-related improvements via their Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB) Program. The applications for FY2025 are due January 14, 2025 and this is a competitive program. In November of 2024, Valdosta experienced rainfall of 10 to 12 inches in a 12-hour period, which is a +/-1000 year storm event. Several of our local culverts and one bridge were severely impacted by erosion. The culverts impacted are on Country Club Drive, River Street, Cypress Street, and Barack Obama Boulevard. The bridge over Sugar Creek on Gornto Road was also impacted. While these are all local City streets, they are classified as arterial and collector streets; therefore, FEMA funding is unavailable for these repairs. The City has proceeded with repairs on Cypress Street and Barack Obama Boulevard using City Stormwater Division forces. In accordance with State and City policies for emergency repairs, the City Engineering Staff has proceeded to obtain quotes for the work on Country Club Drive, River Street, and Gornto Road. Attached is a table summarizing the costs to achieve emergency repairs for five of the most severe impact locations. The estimated total repair cost for this work is \$1.9 million; however, the final scope of repairs is not yet determined. As a result, the GTIB Grant Application is approximately 15% of the overall project, resulting in a Grant Application of \$275,000. The remainder of the project funding will be provided through SPLOST VIII funds. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, recommended that Council approve the GTIB Grant Application submission, which includes the five identified locations in need of repairs, for submittal to SRTA for the 2025 GTIB Grant program.

A **MOTION** by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Gibbs, was unanimously adopted (6-0) to approve the submission of a Grant Application to the 2025 Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank (GTIB) for road and bridge repairs in the City of Valdosta.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

There were no citizens to be heard.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that there will be a Sidewalk Sale in Downtown Valdosta on Saturday, January 11, 2025 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Citizens are encouraged to shop, dine, and enjoy our local establishments and vendors Downtown. The City offices will be closed on Monday, January 20, 2025 in observance of the MLK, Jr. Holiday. Essential services such as Police, Fire, Safety, and Sanitation will continue to operate as scheduled. There will be a Love Where You Live Cleanup on January 25, 2025 from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and volunteers will meet at 1905 North Ashley Street. The area to be cleaned will be Marion Street from East Park Avenue to East College Street.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Howard inquired as to whether they have started sending out notifications for the right-of-way acquisitions for Barack Obama Boulevard. Mayor Matheson stated that he would defer to the City Manager. Councilman Howard stated that he wanted to make sure that citizens are aware of it because the faster they get that done then the faster the construction will take place. Richard Hardy, City Manager, stated that he would check with the Georgia Department of Transportation and will send out something to the Council.

Councilman Harden arrived at 5:39 p.m.

Councilman Gibbs inquired as to what the actual start dates will be for the repairs on Country Club Drive and River Street. Ben O'Dowd, City Engineer, stated that they have a pre-con for Country Club with JWA tomorrow and River Street is scheduled for next week. Originally, River Street was scheduled for this week. We have RPI doing emergency repair work in establishing the by-pass for the sewer collapse which was identified on the 30-inch line. That takes priority whenever we have a sewer that is actively spilling into the creek. He anticipates having signed Contracts next week and Contractors will be issued a Notice to Proceed either next week or the week after. He hopes to get both of the Contractors mobilized before the end of January. Councilman Gibbs stated that he has people asking. Ben O'Dowd stated that Southern Concrete is making excellent headway on the Gornto Road bridge repair. They should be done sometime around mid-February. The work will be visually complete much earlier than it will be open for public use because the concrete has to cure and we have to get appropriate breaks on the concrete. We usually wait 30 days for break on the concrete cores. We could do an early break to make sure it is curing out with the appropriate strength so that it is safe for travel. With all that being said, we will have the bridge to where it looks fixed but we cannot open it for use until we get those early breaks to confirm that the concrete has the strength that it needs. Councilman Gibbs inquired as to whether that is 30 days after. Ben O'Dowd stated that usually you wait for a 30-day break but you could do a 7-day early break to see how the strength trajectory is. Councilman Gibbs stated that we could tell people it will be done by the end of February but it is really like March. Ben O'Dowd stated that it the end of February would be a good target date based on the pace. He had a pre-con meeting with Southern Concrete on Monday and they had a gap in their schedule so they are trying to fill a two week gap with that effort. They have strongly mobilized on this Project. We have been very fortunate with scheduling and how that works because Southern Concrete is the premier bridge Contractor south of Macon. They stay incredibly busy. They did the bridges at Exit 11 so they do very big bridges. This was a small filler Project that they started their year off with so we were very fortunate with the scheduling. Councilman Carroll inquired as to whether they were out of Albany. Ben O'Dowd stated that they were. Councilman Gibbs thanked Ben O'Dowd for the sign and thanked Sarah Denton, Community Relations/Marketing Manager, for putting it on social media as well. He also thanked Police Chief Manahan for the radar in a subdivision which has helped him with phone calls and text messages.

Councilman Carroll stated that some of the Council Members were unable to attend the meetings that were set up with City Manager Richard Hardy, Assistant City Manager Catherine Ammons, and Finance Director Chuck Dinkins to discuss House Bill 581 but the majority has been briefed. The local School Systems have chosen to opt out of the Floating Homestead Exemption. This is something that 63% of Lowndes County voters voted for as a Referendum on the ballot this past November. The best course of action for our property taxpaying citizens and the City as well is to move forward on this. We have a timeline to work with and he would like to ask that we place this on the Agenda for the next Council Meeting. Councilwoman Tooley stated that she had a talk with the School System but now she is more confused. In her conversation with them it never came up but she will talk with them again. Councilman Carroll stated that it impacts School Systems differently than it does the County government or the City government; however, the primary thing is that they are not eligible for a Floating Sales Tax which is a part of House Bill 581. Only the Cities and the County governments are eligible to participate in that Sales Tax. Councilman Gibbs stated that according to our Legislators, House Bill 987 is what some of the School Systems are waiting to come out of this next Session. This will affect them being able to bring everything down 10% or 10 mills. They are waiting on that as well to make a decision. Councilman Carroll stated that March 1st is the deadline. If we do nothing then we are automatically opting in. We just need to make a decision. Councilman McIntyre stated that in his meeting with the City Manager and the Finance Director today, they came to a conclusion that maybe we should send a letter of intent from the City of Valdosta including the intent of the surrounding municipalities. As soon as the County receives that letter, he thinks it should be made public because a lot of people need to understand that if this goes a different direction that it was not the desire of the City of Valdosta. Councilman Carroll stated that it was his understanding that Hahira and Lake Park are both in support. Councilwoman Tooley stated that the City of Valdosta is opting in. Councilman Carroll stated that he thought this was the best course of action. Councilman Gibbs stated that you are automatically in unless you choose to opt in. If we are in and the County decides to opt out, then we are all out. Councilman Carroll stated that we are not out of the Floating Homestead Exemption but we are out of the opportunity to do the Floating Homestead Sales Tax. Tim Tanner, City Attorney, stated that Councilman Carroll wants to put it as an Agenda topic so there would be a Resolution to stay in. Obviously you are in anyway but that would be an official act.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Matheson entertained a motion for adjournment.

A MOTION by Councilman Carroll, seconded by Councilman Howard, was unanimously adopted (7-0) to adjourn the January 9, 2025 Regular Meeting of the Valdosta City Council at 5:49 p.m. to meet again in Regular Session on Thursday, January 23, 2025.

City Clerk, City of Valdosta

Mayor, City of Valdosta