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1986

City Issues

Valdosta City Council Balks On Deciding Budget Request

By DEBORAH BUCKHALTER
Times Staff Writer

Several members of Valdosta City Council reacting to a budget request from the city fire department said that while they support it in spirit, they don't know if the city will have enough money to build a fire station this year.

Valdosta Fire Department Battalion chief Eugene Crawford said last week he is asking City Council to lay aside roughly \$200,000 to build the station this year.

Councilwoman Bette Bechtel said she agrees the station is needed, and that she likes the proposed location near Valdosta High School. She is inclined to support the request, she said.

"The land has been donated, and there is also a growth spurt in the area. I would like to see it budgeted this coming year. But if we just can't swing it, I'd like us to put half aside now, and next year budget the other half, so that in two or three years we'd have enough to go with it."

"I think too, that we should look at all types of buildings we might use," Ms. Bechtel said. "Maybe we could use some aluminum buildings instead of necessarily brick and mortar. I think we have to look at every possible way to cut down the costs."

Councilman Bunnis Williams said the fire station is high on his list of priorities, but doesn't know if Council will be able to afford it or not.

"I'm very much in support of the fire station, I was the one who made the motion to use the donated land; but I'll have to wait until budget time to see where the money will come from," he said. "I really don't know if we can afford it an take care of our department heads and their needs. I think that has to come first, and also we have to be thinking about drainage and paving, but yes, a firestation is most certainly something we need."

Councilman Willie Houseal said it's too premature at this stage to say whether he will approve the request.

"We have a financial problem, with our revenue sharing still on the chopping block, and we're not sure about being able to use the one-percent sales tax yet," he said. "So I can't say I support any of that at this time. We'll have to sit down and go over the budget and do the best we can."

Councilman Sonny Vickers was also noncommittal.

"I don't know if I would support it or not—it's needed, but we have to put everything on the board; paving, drainage, the fire station, all the

departments," Vickers said. "Until we get into the budget and see how much projected revenue we have and see what the city manager and Council is proposing, I couldn't say. Hopefully, the one percent optional sales tax amendment will pass; I think that's where the money would probably come from," he said.

Soon-to-be Mayor Gill Autrey, too, is being cautious.

"I know it's needed, but I haven't seen the budget yet, and it's something we'll have to address when we look at the budget as a whole," he said.

Dr. Richard Winston, to be seated as a new councilman on March 6th, said he has not investigated the issue thoroughly enough to say either way.

"I haven't had the opportunity to be apprised of the need. From what little bit I know, it's something I need to investigate along with the drainage and paving needs," he said.

City Employees To Get In New Budget

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

Across-the-board salary increases of 4 percent for all Valdosta city employees and similar raises of 5 percent for department heads have been tentatively approved in the proposed 1986-87 city budget.

"That's the most important problem we have — pay — not the need for more people," Cason said. "Our people are underpaid."

The approved raises are a compromise between a salary schedule

proposed by City Manager Mike Cason and a preference by most Council members for a workable merit raise system.

Councilman Willie Houseal said he believes the merit system will have to wait until salaries for both professional and nonprofessional employees are brought in line with other cities.

However, he said most of those cities bring in more revenue and are better able to pay the larger salaries.

"We need to look at various taxes,

such as a motel-hotel tax, to tap that source of revenue specifically for salaries," Houseal said. "Our employees are not being paid enough, particularly our policemen and firemen who lay their lives on the line every time they go to work — \$11,000 to \$12,000 is not enough."

In the past several years pay raises for Valdosta city employees have come from money received through federal revenue sharing funds.

Money for this year's increased salaries, without the benefit of revenue

sharing funds, was in the budget proposed by Cason. However, some additional capital improvement expenditures were put into the final draft. Money for those expenditures came from the \$375,000 initially budgeted for salaries.

The balance of about \$196,000 was then allocated for the raises.

Cason based his initial salary proposal on information compiled from figures out of five southeastern cities, Ocala, Fla., Rome, Ga., Sumter, S.C.,

Anniston, Ala., and Greenville, N.C.

These cities represented a similar population class and per capita income level as Valdosta. Most positions in Valdosta were found to be below the five-city average.

The raises proposed, averaging about 5½ percent, would have brought Valdosta's salary structure up to a comparable level with the other southeastern cities, Cason said. However, although agreeing on the need for raises Council disagreed with the way the raises were to be implemented.

Each councilman contacted favored a merit raise system with safeguards that would prevent supervisors being unfair in giving due raises.

Under Cason's proposal each employee's salary was compared and adjusted to the five-city average by position. This resulted in some full-time employees receiving a raise of only \$51 per year while others received increases of more than \$3,000.

Also considered in the comparable pay structure was the per capita general fund expenditures for each of the five study cities. In each case the figures were larger for the other cities.

Anniston's per capita general fund expenditures (\$477) more than doubled Valdosta's (\$214) while Ocala's (\$351), Rome's (\$368), Greenville's (\$378) were substantially larger. Only Sumter's expenditures were within \$100 of Valdosta spending at \$295 per capita

City Votes Down Hotel-Motel

25 Cents

Tax To Fund Salaries

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

Proposals for a motel-hotel tax and budget cuts came out of sharp debate on city employee salaries as Valdosta City Council considered its supplemental budget Thursday night.

During the discussions among council members City Manager Mike Cason said he had not included salary or personnel allocations in the budget because the money available was non-recurring revenue. The non-recurring funds are leftover revenue sharing funds, general capital projects and special assessment paving funds.

Councilman Willie Houseal suggested several ways he thought the city could raise money for salaries and also

suggested tabling the capital outlay budget proposal in favor of immediate salary increases.

"I believe we could still take a look at more money for the employees, especially for the fire and police departments," Houseal said. "There was a promise of more money. We need to look at a motel-hotel tax, alcohol and cigarette tax.

"I would be willing to sacrifice part of my property tax for fire and police protection. I would like to see serious consideration given right away to salaries."

Councilman David Drumheller said Council had determined that non-recurring funds not be used for

salaries or personnel.

"It is not appropriate to use this money," Drumheller said and added that the city employees were owed an explanation.

Councilwoman Bette Bechtel said she agreed that the funds in the supplemental budget were not ongoing and should not be used for salaries.

"I do think though we do have a problem and we are beginning to address that," Mrs. Bechtel said. "I do think we need to look at a motel-hotel tax."

Councilman Sonny Vickers made a motion to approve the budget as presented and that motion drew out Councilman Richard Winston who of-

ferred an amendment to the motion that would have been binding on Council regarding the establishment of motel-hotel tax.

"If we keep on putting it off, we won't find the money," Winston said in calling for the establishment of the tax to be collected starting Jan. 1.

City Attorney George Talley said an ordinance would have to be passed to impose the tax. Councilman Jimmy Rainwater said the tax would have to be imposed along with the county if it was to be effective and that both the city and county would have to enact ordinances.

Talley said a motel-hotel tax had been considered here some eight to 10 years ago. At that time it would have

brought in an additional \$80,000 to \$100,000 per year.

Rainwater summed up the situation by saying, "We all know they're underpaid. Everybody knows that. Mike Cason told us that. Grady Dukes told us that. Everybody told us."

Mayor Gill Autrey said the motel-hotel tax was only part of the solution to the city's money crunch.

"I think we all know what the problem is and I think the motel-hotel tax is an imminent possibility," Autrey said. "I don't think the hotel and motel people would fight it, and I don't think it would be enacted if all the money from it went into salaries.

"I think it is more prudent to look at

cutting the city budget and I've got some ideas on where that can be done."

Council voted first on Winston's amendment to have a motel-hotel tax in place by Jan. 1, and the money collected used for salaries. Houseal, Bunnis Williams and Winston voted for the motion with Bechtel, Rainwater, Drumheller and Vickers opposing.

The second vote, to adopt the supplemental budget, drew opposition only from Houseal and Winston.

Autrey closed the debate by agreeing to appoint a committee by the next council meeting to look into ways of developing new revenue sources for the city.

Valdosta Councilmen Say Bloc

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

Ward politics and bloc voting — a concern of some prior to the recent election under district voting procedures — is not seen as even a possibility by members of Valdosta City Council.

The four votes it took to elect a mayor pro tem at Thursday's council meeting does not reflect special interest voting or disharmony among Council members, but only a desire to set a precedent for future selection of

mayor pro tem, according to those councilmen involved.

"I don't think there will be a problem with ward voting," said Councilman Bunnis Williams. "I'm not concerned because of the caliber of people we have on this council. They will have the whole city as their main concern.

"I think that on down the line, other councils may get into ward politics but not this one. If it gets to the point where I start hearing councilmen saying 'It's my district, my district' I'll bring it to their attention."

Williams said there will be support for issues in a particular district but that solving problems, no matter in what area of the city, will help improve the entire city.

These sentiments were echoed by other councilmen who felt the working relationships on Council will become better as the members get to know each other better.

Councilman Willie Houseal said he also feels it's just a matter of learning each councilman and that ward politics would not be a problem.

New City Council Chooses Pro-Tem Rainwater Named After 4 Votes

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

Valdosta's new mayor and city councilmen were sworn in office Thursday night and saw their first stride turn into a stutter step.

Superior Court Judge H. Arthur McLane first administered the oath of office to Gill Autrey, who succeeds Ernest Nijem as mayor. Autrey officially took office at 6:40 p.m. with the completion of his oath and then took the mayor's seat. The elected members of Council were then sworn in to office and took their seats.

First-time councilmen Richard Winston and James Rainwater joined returning members Sonny Vickers, David Drumheller, Bunnis Williams, Bette Bechtel and Willie Houseal to form the seven-member Council elected under district voting.

The new Council replaces a nine-member Council that had existed since a special election held Feb. 12, 1985, the result of a settlement of civil rights lawsuit between the City of Valdosta

and the U. S. Justice Department.

The first order of business saw the predicted cooperation and smooth working relationships go the way of politics as usual, when the election of a mayor pro tem (by majority vote of Council) resulted in three unsuccessful attempts.

Autrey opened the nominations initially and Winston nominated Rainwater. Williams then nominated Drumheller and Houseal nominated Williams. The first vote did not result in a majority for any one candidate.

Nominations were opened again. On the second round, Drumheller, Rainwater and Bechtel were nominated. Again, the voting resulted in no majority winner.

Nominations were opened for the third time resulting in the nominations of Bechtel and Rainwater. Again, no majority for either.

"At this time I call a small caucus," Autrey said, and called a five-minute recess.

All Council members, Autrey, City



Times Staff Photo By Paul Leavy

McLane Swears In Autrey As Wife, Daughter Look On

Attorney George Talley and City Manager Mike Cason then adjourned to a meeting room where a compromise was struck.

"We discussed the matter of the election of the Mayor Pro Tem with the city attorney. No vote was taken," Autrey said when they returned to Council chambers.

The meeting back in order, nominations were opened for a fourth time. Williams nominated Rainwater and the nominations were closed. Rainwater was elected by unanimous vote and will serve as mayor pro tem for a term of one year.

The one-year term is the compromise reached between forces concerned that a precedent would be set locking the mayor pro tem post to the at-large council position now held by Rainwater.

"There was some discussion, some were concerned, about mayor pro tem being locked into the at-large post. I respect their views," Rainwater said following the meeting.

Before district voting, the Mayor Pro Tem post was filled by the councilman who had been elected with the largest number of votes. He would serve in that post during his full term of office.

The Valdosta Daily Times, Tues., March 11, 1986

Voting, 'Politics' Won't Happen

"I was in favor of ward politics and will continue to be," Houseal said. "Ward politics has allowed many people to participate in politics."

Another councilman who feels the group will meet problems and deal with them on a what's-best-for-the-city basis is David Drumheller, who played a key role in Thursday's selection of a mayor pro tem.

"We will work together for the entire city," Drumheller said. "It would be foolish to do something that would benefit one area and harm another.

There will certainly be issues the we will be divided on, but there will be give and take. I'm very optimistic."

Drumheller's decision not to vote for himself in Thursday's mayor pro tem selection process cost him the job and opened the way for the three less-than-majority votes that threw the process into a backroom caucus.

There, the precedent of one-year terms for the office was established. Following the caucus, James Rainwater was elected unanimously to serve the first such term.

That precedent opens the office to any member of Council rather than having a the post restricted to whomever wins the at-large post.

Drumheller had at first expressed interest in the office but then said later that he had only wanted to assure that the process was left open to any councilman regardless of the district from which he was elected.

That was also the motivation of two other councilmen, Houseal and Williams, who both express an interest in the job.

P. re ix ir y it IR IS 1, e d s

— black and white. We can't just sit down with these things happening." Wade and others propose taking the effort to the community churches in an initial attempt to get the message into the community. Aware that the people needing to be reached will most likely not be in the pews on Sunday morning, Wade said the family members and friends of those people will have to carry the message from the church into the homes and community.

"We want the church to play a part in our hour of darkness, the church

— or what school boys and girls will be going on to stop, back are a great tick youth bites, but able pride a problem

an Council Well Qualified

Valdosta City Council has named Valdosta native James Council, a lawyer who practices here, to be the alternate municipal court judge. It was an outstanding choice for several reasons.

Council is probably the first black to serve on a judicial bench in this city. That alone would not be

enough to qualify him as a city judge. He also has the credentials and criminal law experience to make him very much qualified to serve in the absence of the regular municipal court judge.

Council chose Council and the community has now seen another step forward by our community.

udge

was elected to help I was not elected to said Houseal.

Tommy Vickers, another assistant judge, said he was present for the judge will be to the taxpayers.

a complicated matter put off until (Barry) recorder's Court judge) will expedite the cases."

ows the process used to the position will be a set period with the selected from the most applicants.

Black-On-Black Crime Devastates

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

A problem feeding on a problem best describes the official view of black-on-black crime in Valdosta. Some see little hope for a solution before the coming of age of the next generation of black youth.

Broken homes, undisciplined lifestyles, resentment, depression, violence, economic crime and drugs — which problem leads to the other? Which begins the cycle of destruction and despair within the tightly structured black community?

The majority of participants involved in an effort to reduce black-on-black crime said the problem begins in the weakened family structure and home and then returns there, with drugs and violence, to grow in what are often shattered remains.

The nucleus of the group consisting of ministers, government officials, business people and private citizens is concentrating its efforts on providing education and information to cool what one member described as an atmosphere of hate in the community.

"Black on black crime has always been a problem but not as intense as it is now," said Valdosta City Councilman Willie Houseal. "The last two murders here have been in my district (District 1). There is a breakdown in the black community, the home and in relationships and there's nothing you can do but weed out the problem — start with the youth and build responsible adults."

Houseal referred to two recent homicides in the black community as "adults committing crimes in front of children." He wondered at the trauma and lasting effects involved for what were, in one case, elementary school children exiting a school bus and entering a murder scene.

"I think the present situation will have to run its course. What's going on now would be difficult to stop," Houseal said. "The young blacks are bitter and depressed. There is a great amount of depression and black youth are bitter, not just toward whites, but bitter toward their own people."

"There is a great deal of male pride and machismo involved in the problem

of this grave crime wave in our community, and there is really nothing to do but hope for better things from the next generation."

While holding on to that hope, Houseal, and fellow councilmen Bunnis Williams and Sonny Vickers are working within the group formed to begin seeking an earlier solution.

"We are going to try to get citizens involved in an education program," said one of the group's organizers, W.F. Wade. "To sit down and do nothing is the worst thing we could do. We are all supposed to be peacemakers — black and white. We can't just sit down with these things happening."

Wade and others propose taking the effort to the community churches in an initial attempt to get the message into the community. Aware that the people needing to be reached will most likely not be in the pews on Sunday morning, Wade said the family members and friends of those people will have to carry the message from the church into the homes and community.

"We want the church to play a role. In our hour of darkness, the church has

cut and run — we need them," Wade said. "We can't hear a voice. It's time for people to hear some kind of voice."

The muffled voices railing against the wall of resentment and lack of self-esteem that manifests itself in crime can only agree that each one, on its own, cannot succeed.

"It will take every well-thinking person in Valdosta to rid ourselves of this problem. We can't close our doors and walk away," Wade said.

Valdosta Police Chief Charlie Spray said the problem is severe with all but one of the city's recent homicides being black-on-black.

"The total is high overall, but it is higher in the black community with domestic problems the key factor," Spray said. The only answer people think of in a heated situation is to resort to the use of weapons. It's flight or fight, and they most often elect to fight.

"I can't get a handle on it — find an easy answer."

Spray said the breakdown in the family structure is the root of the problem and advocates an education

City Looks At Assistant Judge

By AMY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

The selection of a lawyer to be assistant Municipal Court judge will be discussed tonight by Valdosta City Council.

The issue of hiring an assistant judge has heated Council meetings this summer with the members split on the need for a back-up judge.

When the Recorder's Court judge must miss a court day, the Mayor pro tem acts as the judge for the day.

However, the cases handled by the court are becoming more complex with jurisdiction on shoplifting cases and

possession of alcoholic beverages by minors granted to Georgia's municipal courts during the 1987 session of the Georgia General Assembly.

"The cases heard in municipal court are not all black and white. There are some grey areas," said Mayor pro tem Willie Houseal. "Having a lawyer to fill in will make the court more efficient. You need competent people who can make competent decisions."

Houseal has served as the judge for one session of court and felt it was an honor to serve in the position.

However, as an elected official Houseal sees a conflict in serving as a part-time judge.

"I was elected to be a city council

member, and I was elected to help make the laws. I was not elected to enforce the law," said Houseal.

Councilman Sonny Vickers, another supporter of the assistant judge, said the extra \$2,500 spent for the judge will be well worth it to the taxpayers.

"Right now, if a complicated matter comes up, it is put off until (Barry) Chapman (the Recorder's Court judge) is there. This will expedite the cases," he said.

If the city follows the process used to select Chapman, the position will be advertised for a set period with the part-time judge selected from the most qualified of the applicants.

Recorder's Court Judge Issue Splits Valdosta Council Members

By AMY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

Discussions were heated and tempers flared as Valdosta City Council approved the first reading of an amendment to the City Charter which will provide a substitute Recorder's Court judge for the city.

"I think we should deny this amendment and put it on the ballot in 1988. We're thinking of changing something that has been in effect for 25 years. This is the people's charter, and the people vote for us," said Councilman Jimmy Rainwater.

One of the sponsors of the amendment, Councilman Sonny Vickers, said City Council should observe a separation of powers which couldn't be done

as long as the Mayor pro tem was called upon to serve as the substitute judge.

The City Charter presently states the mayor or the mayor pro tem are the only legal substitutes in the event the regular judge is absent on court day.

The amendment would allow the City to hire someone, preferably an attorney, to serve as the judge in the event of an absence.

According to Vickers, there is no reason to keep something just because the city has had it for 25 years.

"The Georgia Municipal Association laughed when I told them we were still doing it this way," said Vickers.

Councilman Bunnis Williams added, "This is not the Mayor's court anymore. It's no longer even the Recorder's Court. It's now the

Municipal Court," said Williams.

He added since the court now handles cases of shoplifting, the case load is more complex and involves more than just a decision of innocence or guilt.

"I really don't understand why when some people bring something up, there is always a hassle," said Williams.

Councilmember Bette Bechtel asked City Attorney George Talley how many times the city charter has been changed.

Talley said it had been changed once in 1982 when a referendum was held concerning city wide fire protection.

Councilman David Drumheller said Council should look to the future, because in 5-10 years, the city will need two judges.

"Now, if the judge feels the mayor

pro tem can't handle the case, then he can continue it," he said.

In response to a statement that an additional judge would increase the revenue brought in by the court, Drumheller said, "Adding another judge won't increase the revenue. The only way to increase the revenue would be to increase the police department. Judges don't bring it in."

A motion to deny consideration of amending the charter died with Rainwater and Drumheller voting for and Williams, Vickers and Mrs. Bechtel voting against.

The second motion to pass the first reading of the amendment passed with Mrs. Bechtel, Williams and Vickers voting for, Jimmy Rainwater against and Drumheller abstaining.

Council Denies Zoning Requests

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

Running headlong into its own ordinances, Valdosta City Council denied two zoning requests Thursday night.

A request for a variance to the parking requirements in an office-professional zoning district was denied by Council when it was pointed out that the zoning ordinance forbids parking areas to extend onto public rights of way.

A variance was considered for Jack Kent for his office property at 1216 Baytree Road. Kent requested the variance to allow for expansion of his office.

He said he would need to move his parking area from the rear of the lot to the side of the lot across Green Circle. However, the relocation would have extended the parking area 6 feet onto public right of way.

Council was advised that it could not rule in violation of its own ordinance —

the request was denied.

Another zoning ordinance section in place since the original annexation of property adjacent to Canna Drive resulted in the invalidation of a rezoning request.

Council declared the rezoning application for property belonging to Wayne Fann and Charles Powers at the southern end of Fawnwood Circle invalid based on the original agreement with the single-family dwelling property owners on Canna Drive.

Under the previous annexation agreement that is part of the zoning ordinance any property adjacent to the surrounding property must have a buffer area of property within the same zoning classification.

The requested change from single-family residential to a zoning that would have allowed attached housing did not meet the requirement. Council authorized a refund of the \$50 fee paid by the owner after the invalidation

ruling.

In other zoning matters, Council:

— Approved a right of way annexation along Staten Road from the city limits to Lake Laurie. Ken Garren of the planning commission said this type of annexation is standard following an annexation of property where there is adjacent city property.

— Approved with one dissenting vote the annexation of property belonging to the Boys Club of Valdosta located at Staten Road opposite Lake Laurie. The planning commission had not recommended this annexation for approval.

Spokesmen for the Boys Club said there only reason for wanting to come into the city was to save money on fire insurance.

Some concern was voiced by Councilman Willie Houseal as to the effectiveness of fire protection for the building as no fire hydrants are within three-quarters of a mile to the

structure.

Both Robert Soper and Dr. Bill Broadfoot, representing the Boy's Club, restated their desire to save whatever money they could for the organization and asked for approval of the annexation they feel will lower the insurance rates.

Councilman Bunnis Williams cast the vote to deny. He said he felt the move amounted to spot zoning and also voiced concern for the availability of proper fire and police protection.

— Approved the annexation of property belonging to Dr. and Mrs. Arnold Kelz at 200 Ridge Road in Cherry Creek Subdivision. The area was said to have been one of the areas of county property in the city.

— Approved the rezoning of property belonging to Allan Canup at 102 Georgia Ave. that would allow for renovation of the residence into professional offices.

The location is within the Historic District which requires the renovation of the structure to its original state.

— Approved the rezoning of property belonging to W.W. Carroll, J.D. Carroll Jr. and Berkley Mackey at the southeast corner of South Patterson Street and Ulmer Avenue from R-10 to C-H.

A portion of the property may include right of way acquisitions necessary to complete a proposed truck route.

Approved updating the city's subdivision regulations by inserting amendments termed "housekeeping matters" by Garren and City Attorney George Talley.

The amendments are to bring the subdivision regulations in line with sections of the city's zoning ordinance that have been in place and enforced for years, Garren said.

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Ordinances On Hold By Council

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

Dec 27, 1985

Controversial ordinances dealing with signs and burglar alarms are under a moratorium and are to be reworked after months of pressure on Valdosta City Council from businessmen.

Representatives from factions opposed to the two ordinances showed up at Thursday night's Council meeting to complain about the laws which they said adversely affected their businesses.

However, Mayor Gill Autrey and City Manager Mike Cason defused the situation with an early announcement that the two ordinances would be examined and discussed at the next meeting.

Council requested that complaints and suggestions regarding the sign ordinance be directed to Ken Garren of the South Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission, who will work with City Attorney George Talley in reorganizing the ordinance.

"We had good intentions with the sign ordinance but it is creating some problems in the community," said Autrey. "We will place a moratorium on enforcement of the sign ordinance until after the mid-month (May 22) Council meeting and I will ask that any cases made under the ordinance be continued until after the report on reorganizing the ordinance."

"We were concerned about how the city looked when we set up the ordinance," said Councilman Willie Houseal.

He suggested that Council not forget the original intent of the law as they consider changes.

Garren said no action can be taken on revision of the ordinance until after a new version has been presented to Council and then advertised properly.

The burglar alarm ordinance, aimed at reducing the number of false alarms, is in similar limbo. It is to be changed and no fines are to be levied between now and the next Council meeting.

Tom Williams, owner of Eagle Investigations and Alarm Services, started to make his fifth appeal to Council in as many months regarding the alarm law, when he was advised by Cason that Council would also be looking into changes in that law.

Williams characterized the law as being unworkable. It calls for the owners of businesses or residences to be summoned to recorder's court after the second false alarm when then alarms are said to be caused by clearly established negligence. The owners would face a \$25 fine for each negligent alarm.

Other businessmen quickly termed the ordinance ridiculous.

City Councilman Pushes Hiring Of Blacks, Women

Jan 29, 86
Meyer

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

An affirmative action proposal has been put forward by Valdosta City Councilman Willie Houseal as a guideline for the city's hiring practices regarding minorities and women.

Houseal presented the 33-page document to Council Thursday night as the regular meeting was ending. He asked that each councilman read the document and have its proposals entered on the agenda for the next meeting.

The figures used by Houseal in forming the basis for his proposals to enhance the city's hiring policies are from the city's Equal Employment Opportunity Annual Report and reflect June 1985 employment.

These figures show 20 of 21 blacks holding administrative or professional jobs that pay more than \$10,000 per year with the city are in the fire and police departments. Four of the five females are in the police department. The other is female is the Clerk of Council.

However, City Manager Mike Cason said, "The city is making a tremendous amount of progress. We're trying as hard as we can to hire more blacks. If we see we have pockets where blacks are not being promoted or hired, we are correcting that situation."

Houseal said he feels more could be done in hiring minorities and women and he said he hopes the proposals he has put forward will be adopted by Council.

"The report identifies barriers that are in place and offers a method of

tapping the wealth of blacks and females for employment," Houseal said. "I hope Council will implement the programs needed to accelerate the progress."

The proposal calls for the city to create an employee advisory council, a committee to hire the handicapped, and a personnel review board.

One other proposal calls for a full-time position of affirmative action officer to be created.

Personnel Director Tom Nichols said he has seen a copy of the report but has not had sufficient time to read it completely. He said he would make his remarks public in a report to the city manager.

Cason said he sees little need for the proposal because the efforts suggested are already under way.

However, Houseal said, "There aren't many other avenues except personal commitment. And that's not fair to the city manager or the personnel director."

"The city has a way of doing things, and I don't think it will just change. It will take more than this program to change it. We need economic growth to help provide more jobs and we need motivation and enforcement of civil rights laws after the minorities have prepared themselves.

"This is just the starting point," he said.

The affirmative action proposal calls for the city to achieve an employee profile in each major job classification which shows an appropriate reflection of black and female population within four years.

Councilwoman Bechtel then made a motion to have the old ordinance remain as it stands. The vote was unanimous in favor of that motion. Direct the inspection department to begin enforcement of the ordinance and instruct the

He also objected to the \$10 permit fee that would come out of the \$35 rent he charges per month for the signs. He suggested signs in place prior to passage of the ordinance not be affected by the limitations.

but maintain the stay in place indefinitely distance requirement. Councilman Sonny Vickers regarding the amendments.

made," Garren said. "I will not put forth a recommendation because there can be no action here tonight. The ordinance has to go through the planning commission, be advertised and brought back before you for approval."

"Mr. Trantham, you're not the only one selling



Council Members Houscal, Williams Inspect New Truck

City Fire Department Commissions Truck

By AMY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

The Valdosta Fire department's newest acquisition, a triple combination pumper truck, was unveiled Tuesday at a luncheon hosted by Station One of the VFD.

"The firefighters are proud of their equipment ... and we appreciate that you all have enough interest to come be a part of this honorable occasion," said Chief Richard Williams.

Williams said around the turn of the century firefighters use to demonstrate and show off the equipment in the middle of the city.

"We've got the same pride today. We'd like people to know what we've got," said Williams.

Mayor Gill Autrey told the some 80 firemen, city officials and citizens in attendance that the \$138,000 piece of equipment was part of a process to improve the department.

"We are proud to have this engine as part of a continuous expansion and upgrading of the Valdosta Fire department," he said. "The people in the

fire department make a difference here and a lot of times they don't get recognized."

He added Valdosta had one of the best fire insurance ratings and that the city council is committed to backing the department.

The new truck, purchased from the Emergency One Fire Equipment Company in Ocala, Fla., includes several different sizes of hose and many special features.

Williams said when he requested the truck from the city, he asked the men in his department for their suggestions for equipment and features.

Seat belts for all the fire fighters, safety bars and equipment placed on the sides of the truck rather than the top will make the dangerous job of firefighting a bit safer, he explained.

"This really makes our job a little easier," he said.

This week and last week, the department has also been celebrating National Fire Prevention Week. More than 2,000 area school children will visit Station One and Two during those two weeks, Williams said.

City Council Stands Behind Sign Law

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

Valdosta's sign ordinance has passed the first test of reaction to its initial enforcement by a unanimous vote from City Council.

Council voted Thursday night to leave the ordinance as is, rather than consider amendments to portable sign sections. Enforcement is to begin immediately.

Council heard first from Ken Garren of the planning commission on the original law and on the proposed amendments.

Garren said he and City Attorney George Talley had met concerning the proposed changes to the ordinance.

"However, I wasn't there when the changes were made," Garren said. "I will not put forth a recommendation because there can be no action taken here tonight. The ordinance has to go before the planning commission, be advertised and then brought back before you for approval."

Garren said the original law was the result of six months work that included consultation by a sign ordinance committee with sign owners and businessmen. The group also used 11 ordinances

from other cities as guidelines.

"We met with the sign people who responded. We had their input," Garren said. "Then we had public hearings on the ordinance."

The public hearings brought more input, both positive and negative. However, Garren said indications were that most people could live with the law without any problems.

"We started enforcing it. Now we have problems," Garren said. "The only problem seems to be the portable sign sections."

The ordinance calls for a limitation of 90 days on placement of portable signs at a location and establishes that there be 750 feet between sign locations.

An amendment would have allowed the signs to stay in place indefinitely but maintain the distance requirement.

"We took all the guts out of this," said Councilman Sonny Vickers regarding the amendments.

"It's not yet — just proposed," said Garren.

Councilman Jimmy Rainwater asked Garren that with the amendments the portable signs would require only a \$10 annual permit and would

be allowed to stay in place indefinitely.

"That's correct," Garren said.

"We haven't done anything then," Rainwater said.

Portable sign owner Max Trantham of Trantham Signs also voiced his opinion at the meeting.

He told Council he would be out of business in 90 days if the original ordinance was not amended.

"If you adopt this ordinance, I can't buy any more signs and in 90 days I'll have to go out and pick up the 50 I have rented," Trantham said. "I'm not going to do it!"

Trantham said he had nowhere to store the signs and the customer turnover in Valdosta would not be high enough to keep him in business with the 90-day limit.

He also objected to the \$10 permit fee that would come out of the \$35 rent he charges per month for the signs. He suggested signs in place prior to passage of the ordinance not be affected by the limitations.

"Mr. Trantham, you're not the only one selling those signs in Valdosta," Councilman Willie Houseal said. "Have you considered the problem we face with these signs?"

Houseal said the signs were often a traffic hazard due to the locations and lights. He also indicated the problem went far beyond the 50 rented by Trantham.

"The signs were bought in good faith," Trantham said of his investment over the past eight years. "I shouldn't be punished."

Council members responded with individual opinions on the ordinance.

"We should remember, there was a large cross section of people in Valdosta who said the sign ordinance was not strong enough," said Councilwoman Bette Bechtel.

Garren stepped forward to again state that nothing could be done regarding the amendments until proper legal steps had been followed.

Councilwoman Bechtel then made a motion to have the old ordinance remain as it stands.

The vote was unanimous in favor of that motion.

"Direct the inspection department to begin enforcement of the ordinance and instruct the Records Court judge to reschedule any cases before him," Autrey said to Cason immediately following the vote.

OCT 24, 86

Spousal Expenses Argued

City Travel Policy Under Review

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

The travel policy for Valdosta's elected and appointed officials will come under scrutiny by a committee that will return recommendations on spousal travel expenses paid by the city.

Councilwoman Bette Bechtel offered an amendment to the city code Thursday night that would have reinstated a section disallowing reimbursement of expenses incurred by spouses except with prior Council approval on an individual trip basis.

However, within the request that the amendment be considered, Mrs. Bechtel asked that a committee be formed to study the code section and make recommendations as to whether changes should be made.

Councilman Jimmy Rainwater made a motion to table the amendment request until a committee could make

its recommendations. This, he said, would eliminate changing the section now, and then having to make another change relative to the committee's findings.

The motion to table met with less than unanimous support as Mrs. Bechtel voted against, Richard Winston abstained and Sonny Vickers, Jimmy Rainwater, David Drumheller, Bunnis Williams and Willie Houseal voted in favor.

The questioning of spousal travel expense reimbursement comes after an amendment was put forward by Mayor Gill Autrey and approved by Council. Some negative citizen response to the amount of money reimbursed to councilmen for their spouse's expenses on city business trips led to the committee being formed.

Vickers said he has had several citizens comment on the matter but that none have been in the form of

complaints. Vickers and Autrey were vocal in their support of the policy allowing the expense reimbursement.

Each said they thought the spouses played a key role in the election process and in helping them better serve the community.

Mrs. Bechtel said she had had numerous complaints from what she termed "irate citizens."

"I've had more than two calls," she said in response to Vickers. "The people who called me were just plain mad."

Vickers explained what is an increase in travel expense to the city by saying that he, Williams, Houseal and others on Council are taking advantage of the various seminars and conventions more often than were the veterans of the previous Council who had less incentive to attend the informative meetings.

He said he and the other new members of Council need the input they receive at the different meetings. Vickers said another factor involved in the expense totals — that was not a consideration under previous councils — is the very presence of Williams, Houseal and himself as the first black members.

He said this has resulted in additional expenses incurred when they attend the various programs aimed at helping them deal with the specific problems they must address as black elected officials.

In other matters, Council:

— Accepted the low bid of \$36,977.22 for the purchase of three trucks.

The bid, from Langdale Ford, was

one of only two received out of the 12 bid packages mailed to various dealers.

— Approved an expenditure of \$7,050 as the city's share of paying for the extension of 12-inch waterline from North Valdosta Road to a connecting eight-inch line that will serve Valdosta Country Club and Bellemeade Sub-division.

The city requested the use of 12-inch line in the extension that will cost about \$150,000 and be paid by the Valdosta Country Club.

— Accepted a low bid of \$151,929 from Standard Contractors for the completion of paving, drainage and water and sewer improvements in the Community Development Block Grant target area of Gordon Street to West Street and West Street to Mary Street. Sustella Avenue and Johnson Street have been completed in the area.

— Approved payment of half the cost of emergency repairs to the Smith Street Bridge.

The total cost is estimated at \$15,000 to \$18,000 and will be shared by the city and county under joint ownership. The work will include driving steel pilings to support a new steel beam under the existing concrete deck of the bridge.

— Approved a resolution and contract with the Georgia Department of Transportation for DOT's participation in the taxiway lighting project at Valdosta Regional Airport.

Dot will pay 5 percent of the total cost of the project with the remainder financed primarily through grants.

Capitol Christmas Tree Cut

MACDOEL, Calif. (AP) — The first Christmas tree for the U.S. Capitol to come from west of the Mississippi is a 63-foot-tall Shasta red fir from the Mamath National Forest.

"It makes a beautiful Christmas tree," said forest employee Tom Hamilton, who started the campaign to choose a tree from a Western forest. "I don't think it would ever happen."

Hamilton also was the one who found the red fir, popularly known as a silver pine, which was chosen from six can-

didates last May by Capitol landscape architect Paul Puncus.

A team of volunteer loggers felled the fir Thursday.

It will be hauled by truck Nov. 8 to Yreka and loaded on a railroad car for the 3,500-mile trip to Washington, D.C., according to forest spokesman John Silvius.

The tree is to be erected on the west lawn of the Capitol and adorned with about 10,000 ornaments made by California schoolchildren, Silvius said.

City's Hiring Practices Far From Acceptable

In articles that appeared in the Valdosta Daily Times May 12-13, 1986; various statements were made by those who wish for us to believe the city's hiring practices are acceptable — hogwash! While slavery was "acceptable" to the slave-owners, it wasn't acceptable to the slaves.

While discrimination is "acceptable" to those who discriminate, it is not acceptable to those being discriminated against.

There are those who say, "The call for an affirmative action program by one member of City Council might

July 86
push the city further than other members of council or the taxpayers want to go." The city of Valdosta (by route of the City Manager's office) saw it to be "acceptable" not to hire any black person as a departmental head. Our police department saw the hiring of nine (9) blacks as "acceptable."

City Manager Mike Cason was quoted as saying that he: "sees little need for the proposal because the efforts suggested are already underway." Mr. Cason's remarks were in response to an affirmative action

proposal drawn up by Valdosta City Councilman Willie Houseal. Mr. Cason also said, "The city is making a tremendous amount of progress. We're trying as hard as we can to hire more blacks. If we see we have pockets where blacks are not being promoted or hired, we are correcting that situation."

Look no further Mr. Cason, the Valdosta Police Department promotional system is questionable, relating to their record of promoting black officers. And you haven't hired a black person as a departmental head during your tenure as city manager.

I am mindful that there will be citizens who will resent my being critical of the status-quo and may even demand that I remain silent or be silenced while others will be stimulated into thinking about conditions and proposals that might otherwise have never come to their attention. From criticism a new dialogue may begin and, ultimately, a new trend in public opinion develop.

Jimmy Wilcox
Valdosta

Council Tables Alarm Monitoring Issue

May 86

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

A proposal to remove an alarm monitoring station from Valdosta police headquarters met with resistance from city businessmen Thursday night.

Representatives of jewelry stores and financial institutions said the proposal to switch the 150 fire and burglary alarms from police to private monitoring would endanger their ability to be insured.

The problem of relocating the alarm monitoring system comes with the fact that the system and the building housing it must be Underwriters Laboratory approved. The process of setting up such an establishment has taken up to six months in some areas.

The proposal to move the alarm monitoring was tabled for further study.

In other matters, Council: — Appointed a committee to deal with affirmative action matters to be studied and reported to Council.

Willie Houseal will chair the committee with members Bette Bechtel and Jimmy Rainwater. Mayor Gill Autrey instructed the committee to meet as often as necessary and to report its findings to Council.

Houseal said committee will not be as is to be studied and reported to Council.

tion of 90 days at any location off-premises portable signs. — Approved a resolution executive contract with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for a \$10 grant award to be applied to rework on a swimming pool at South...

By AMY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

City Hall will be closed Monday and Tuesday while city officials make arrangements for temporary office space following the early Saturday fire, said Valdosta City Manager Mike Cason.

"We're going to make our minds up this weekend," said Cason Saturday.

Options Cason is considering include renting office space in the downtown area for customer service such as the water department and maybe the license office, he said.

"Some of the offices can stay here," said Cason. "The ones that have air conditioning, like accounting, will be all right."

Other departments like parks and recreation may be moved to the general purpose room of Mathis City Auditorium, said Cason.

Even though the main fire damage was limited to the third floor and the attic, the building will be closed to the public as a protective measure.

According to Cason, as workers replace the roof the possibility exists of roof tiles falling.

Clean up and restoration work began immediately after the fire Saturday with city employees removing furniture, which will be stored in the city warehouse, while a Valdosta cleaning service pumped water from the second and third floor.

While most of the fire damage was contained to the third floor and the attic, the second floor council chamber was damaged with water gushing in after chunks of the ceiling fell.

"We lost about 25 percent of the ceiling," said Public Works Director E.R. Brown.

Water damage extended all the way to the basement which flooded as firefighters attempted to extinguish the blaze.

Holes in the roof have been temporarily covered with tin and plastic to prevent more water from entering the building, said Cason.

Two Valdosta policemen will be stationed at City Hall until Monday morning, said Cason.

According to Mayor pro tem Willie Houseal, the fire won't stop the function of the city.

"This is a crime against the city, if we have to hold meetings on the sidewalk, we will," said Houseal. Mayor Gill Autrey was out of town.

Most of the debris was removed from the building Saturday with 80-90 percent of the water out of the building by afternoon, said Williams.

City Won't Change Revenue Sharing

June 86

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

Valdosta City Council plans to go forward with its appropriations for the \$350,000 in revenue sharing funds in the face of a request for a restraining order that would prohibit the planned spending.

"There was a private lawsuit filed to stop the plan," said Councilman David Drumheller. "But, there has been no injunction against the city. So, we will proceed with the revenue sharing plan as we voted."

City manager Mike Cason said there is still a possibility that an injunction will be filed out of district court in Macon. But, he said he has had no word on the matter from Judge Wilbur Owens, who would rule on the request.

The request for a temporary restraining order on spending of the funds was filed in February. The request objected to the planned spending in conjunction with a request to prevent hiring or promotions within the Valdosta Police Department.

The requests would prevent continuing hiring/promoting practices that are alleged to be discriminatory against the black officers who brought suit against the city and department in March 1985.

The group's complaint was filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Councilmen Burnis Williams and Willie Houseal agreed that the spending of the revenue sharing funds as planned, including \$250,000 earmarked for a topographical map that would aid in planning drainage and paving projects would go forward.

"From what I gather, the request for the injunction has not been answered," said Williams. "I think we can move on it (spending plan) as passed without any problem."

Houseal said he thought the threat of injunction was about "played out" and that although he would have preferred more immediate spending on needs paving and drainage problems instead of the map expenditure, the plan adopted would be implemented.

The map project will delay major corrective drainage and paving projects until late in the year. But, the map will help ensure that correcting one problem does not create another, according to officials.

Under the approved spending plan, in addition to the \$250,000 map expenditure the city will spend \$33,000 for cemetery improvements, \$65,000 on paving projects and \$7,000 on Fairfax Park improvements.

Should an injunction still come down from district court, City Attorney George Talley would appear before Judge Owens to argue the city's case.

Roy Copeland, attorney for the officers filing the suit, was not available for comment on the matter.

May 86

Council Tables Alarm Monitoring Issue

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Representatives of jewelry stores and financial institutions said the proposal to switch the 150 fire and burglary alarms from police to private monitoring would endanger their ability to be insured.

The problem of relocating the alarm monitoring system comes with the fact that the system and the building housing it must be Underwriters Laboratory approved. The process of setting up such an establishment has taken up to six months in some areas.

The proposal to move the alarm monitoring was tabled for further study.

In other matters, Council:

— Appointed a committee to deal with affirmative action matters to be

studied and reported to Council.

Willie Houseal will chair the committee with members Bette Bechtel and Jimmy Rainwater. Mayor Gill Autrey instructed the committee to meet as often as necessary and to report its findings to Council.

Houseal said committee meetings will not begin until after the end of the school year.

— Approved a motion to retain the sign ordinance without amendments that would have lifted the time restric-

tion of 90 days at any location off-premises portable signs.

— Approved a resolution executing contract with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for a \$10,000 grant award to be applied to repair work on a swimming pool at Southside Recreation Center. About \$20,000 has been raised in addition to the grant pay for completion of the project.

— Approved emergency payment \$1,242 as the cost of replacing a fault transformer at Sunset Park.

— Voted to follow through on city policy of condemnation procedures on property slated for purchase under the Community Block Grant Program. The resolution to purchase the property was denied.

— Approved the only bid on a lease agreement for operation of a concession stand at Scott Park. The Child Health Association of Lowndes County submitted the only bid and will continue to operate the stand.

— Tabled a joint appointment to the city/county zoning board for further consultation with county officials.

— Approved running city water without city sewer to three-lot section of Pine Point Circle. However, Council turned down a portion of the request that would have had the city pay for the difference in the cost between 6-inch pipe and 8-inch pipe on the property.

— Presented the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting award to Finance Director Richard Hamlen for work on the city's annual financial report.

June 86

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City Council Rejects Mass Transit Plan

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

A city-run public transportation system here is a distant and only a slight possibility if action by Valdosta City Council is any indication.

A proposal that would have effectively created such a system was rejected by Council Thursday night on a split vote, with Mayor Gill Autrey casting the deciding vote in favor of David Drummheller's motion not to approve the plan.

Council split on the issue with Drummheller, Jimmy Rainwater and Bunnis Williams voting in support of the motion, while Willie Houseal, Sonny Vickers and Richard Winston voted against the motion to reject the

Proposal

The proposal resulted not from a dire need for public transportation here, but from a rejected budget item request by Dave Christian, director of the city's recreation department, that asked for two new mini-buses to replace the existing buses used to transport participants in the department's programs.

Christian said each of the buses used by his department has to be repaired at least twice a week. He also said both having traveled more than 100,000 miles, will have to be replaced within a year in any case.

However, his department's and most other capital expenditure requests were turned down in budget sessions.

by loss of revenue sharing and transportation project demands.

John Lawson, transportation planner for the Area Planning and Development Commission, stepped into the picture with a plan that would cut the city's share of the purchase price for two buses to \$6,440 — filling the recreation department needs and at same time creating part-time mass transit system.

Under the plan, the balance of \$57,960 would have been paid with federal and state money through the Urban Mass Transit Administration. That agency would also partially pay for the operation, maintenance and replacement buses through reimbursement or

However, Council's concern about the city's liability in the operation of the buses which would be shared according to public and recreation department needs and carry citizens for a per-ride fee. The cost of liability insurance also helped stop the plan cold.

Even members who supported the plan in principal had questions as to the effectiveness of such a limited approach to public transportation.

Lawson said the two buses would not serve the needs of the city's population and that six or seven buses would be needed later.

Council expressed unanimous concern over the transportation needs of the surrounding area.

would benefit from such a service, but cited other options available and encouraged the private sector to participate more in filling the needs of the community.

In an effort to meet the needs of what Lawson's study said are 5,000 elderly, 100 handicapped and 30 percent of all black households who would use the system, Council requested an updated transportation study of the city. That study is expected to detail the transportation needs and how to best meet them.

The matter of a public mass transportation system in Valdosta may be left to the voters in a referendum that could include a question of financing.

Miller's Lane Answer Found: Tear It Down

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

Miller Lane's days are numbered.

The high-crime area, long considered one of the drug distribution centers of Valdosta, will literally be wiped off the map under a project to be paid for through a \$700,000 Community Development Block Grant approved for the city.

"The funds will be spent in the Miller Lane target area and will include rehabilitation, acquisition, demolition and relocation," said Dianne Giddens of the South Georgia Planning and Development Commission. "It will also include street and water and sewer improvements."

The city will acquire 36 structures in the Miller Lane area and demolish these structures that include the "shotgun" houses, narrow structures often constructed by companies to house laborers, that make up the residences on Miller Lane.

"They'll be demolished to remove the slumlike and blighted conditions in the area," Ms. Giddens said in reading from the grant proposal. There are 69 houses in the target area with 34 of these described as "shotgun" houses.

The grant also calls for the renovation of 33 houses and the relocation of 32 families from the area that is bordered on the north by Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, on the south by McDougal Street, on the east by Holiday Street and on the west by Troup Street.

The area, referred to by Valdosta Police Chief Charlie Spray as a "Combat Zone", has been the focus of law enforcement officials for years with added concentration during the past year. The increased efforts have resulted in numerous drug busts on the

sparsely populated, dead-end street named Miller Lane.

Councilman Bunnis Williams has pushed for the cleanup efforts and was the first to recommend that the Miller Lane property that is within his district be purchased by the city and eliminated.

With the realization of his proposal at hand, Williams sees a need for continued vigilance beyond the clearing of one high crime area.

"Miller Lane could be anywhere in Valdosta," he said. "This (the demolition of Miller Lane) won't solve the drug problem in the city. We need to work hard to not allow another Miller Lane."

At-large Councilman Jimmy Rainwater echoed Williams sentiments and said, "Not a city council meeting goes by that someone doesn't complain about Miller Lane. It's a very dangerous situation that we don't want to exist in Valdosta. This funding will enable us to remedy that problem. We need to get it out of the way."

Get it out of the way they will with the demolition of the houses and the closing of the street. A through street, to be named Houseal Drive, will be constructed between MLK Drive and Holiday Street to provide access to the cleared and improved area that will be available for the development of low income housing.

The city plans to work with Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit organization, in constructing the housing in the area that will benefit from larger water mains, sewer lines and curb and gutter.

The grant will also allow the reallocation of \$140,000 in budgeted city money toward the construction of a fire station on the northside of the city. Council will consider that allocation during coming budget sessions.

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proposal.

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The matter of a public mass transportation system in Valdosta may be left to the voters in a referendum that could include a question of financing through a 1-mill tax increase.

Corback

City Travel Policy Meets Norm

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

A study is being done by City Council of travel expenses and City Manager Mike Cason says it appears the city policy is in line with several area cities.

As a Valdosta City Council committee considers the status of the city's travel policy regarding spousal expenses, most council members appear to favor the inclusion of their spouses on government business trips at city expense.

The out-of-town travel expenses of the current Council, while larger than the previous Council and a matter of the economic means of some of the members, are also related to the new members serving on the Council, according to City Manager Mike Cason.

"The increase is economic — some members pay a large amount of the expenses themselves while others cannot afford to do that," Cason said. "You have to understand that the makeup of the council has changed and the economic means of the council members. There is also more travel. They (council members) are traveling more — the new members need to be educated in the ways they can best operate on Council.

"The longer they stay on Council, the less they travel. At least that has been the history of it."

Cason cited examples, backed up by travel vouchers, of a decrease in travel by members with longevity on Council. Former Councilman Ashley Hill, I.H. "Bubber" Tillman and Jack May traveled minimally if at all most years. "They had been on Council for years

and had attended almost all the meetings before," Cason said. Former Councilwoman Jo Ann Hartman's travel folders were also thin or empty as are Councilwoman Bette Bechtel's.

Cason said Mayor Gill Autrey and Mrs. Bechtel often have low travel expenses because they pick up many of the incidental expenses involved. He said Councilmen Sonny Vickers, Bunnis Williams and Willie Houseal often turn in higher expense reports due to a different economic status from that of Autrey or Bechtel.

Council requested that Cason investigate the travel policies of several area cities to establish a guideline for a recommendation from the committee considering Valdosta's policy.

"I checked with Thomasville, Albany

and Waycross. They pay for it all. They pay whatever expenses are submitted by Mayor and Council and pay for the expenses of their spouses," Cason said. "What we are doing is not out of line with surrounding cities."

The average expenditure per trip of the current council is at \$560 and includes, as in the past, transportation, lodging, meals, tips, entertainment, taxis and incidental expenses.

The average per-trip travel expenditure for members of the previous council (using partial data from 1985-86) was at \$294. However, if former Mayor Ernest Nijem's monthly "in-town travel" expenses (\$4,208.42 from June 1984 to Feb. 1986) are included, that average jumps to \$573 per trip.

"The in-town travel expenses at .22

cents per mile is still available to the Mayor, (Gill Autrey) but he has told us he does not want it," said City Manager Mike Cason. "Mayor Nijem operated differently. He asked Council to approve the travel expense and they did."

Cason said the former mayor was in and out of city hall quite often and said Nijem said he needed the expense money because of the many ribbon cuttings and other functions he attended as a representative of the city.

Autrey operates with less direct contact at city hall, Cason said. He said Autrey has a business and comes to city hall once or twice a week.

The committee is scheduled to report recommendations to Council at its next meeting. Cason also will present his findings.

Vote Close

City OKs Land Donation To County

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

In a split vote Thursday night, Valdosta City Council approved a request to donate land worth an estimated \$192,000 to Lowndes County to be used as a site for a new health department building.

The completion of the transfer was made subject to the approval of grant money to be used in the construction of the project on the 3½-acre parcel located near South Georgia Medical Center.

The land meets the requirements stipulated by physicians who regular provide their services to the health department.

They had requested that the new site for the building be as near as possible to SGMC, and if possible that the health department be part of the medical center complex.

The decision by Council to donate the land came with three dissenting votes led by opposition to what was described as an unnecessary rush to decide the matter.

Councilwoman Bette Bechtel said the request had only been before Council for six days and that was not enough time to consider the proposal and what the future might hold for development in the area by the city.

"We need more time to give thought to the use of the land," Mrs. Bechtel said. "What are our plans? Do we have any plans? Six days is not enough time to decide the fate of that land."

Councilman Bunnis Williams and Willie Houseal suggested negotiations with county officials that might lead to

cooperation between the two governments in funding the city's recreation program or in bringing the county into the purchase of a future site for a civic center.

Councilmen Sonny Vickers and Richard Winston favored approval of the land donation without delay. They both said the planned expansion of the health department was needed and that the location was critical to the continued cooperation of the physicians who staff the operation.

Vickers and Winston also cited what

they said was a growing need for a larger city auditorium or civic center and the likelihood that the present site of the auditorium would be sufficient for that complex.

Parking problems said to be a major concern earlier in the week were not brought up in the pre-vote discussions.

Councilmen David Drumheller and Jimmy Rainwater joined Vickers and Winston in voting to approve the donation.

Williams, Houseal and Mrs. Bechtel voted against the proposal.

12/11/86

City Council Provides Project

The Valdosta Daily Times, Fri., Oct. 10, 1986 3-A

Jet With More Monies

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

Project Jet got another financial boost Thursday night with the approval of a \$10,000 grant from Valdosta City Council.

The money, brings the total funds received for the project to \$30,000 — just more than half what is needed to complete the two-phase effort through the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce.

The first phase of attracting another airline is expected to cost about \$32,000

and includes the fee for a Kurth Associates, a consulting firm hired to recruit another airline to serve Valdosta Regional Airport.

Second phase costs are set at \$20,000 and include paying for advertising and other public relation efforts aimed at increasing public awareness of services available at the facility. This in hopes of regaining passenger traffic lost to surrounding area airports over the years of declining service and increasing rates here.

Richard Reissiger, Project Jet

chairman, said other monies collected have come from allocations of \$10,000 from Lowndes County, \$7,000 from the Industrial Authority and \$3,000 from collection efforts mounted in the private sector.

He expects a request for an additional \$5,000 carried to Governor Joe Frank Harris by local state legislators to be approved out of the governor's discretionary emergency fund.

If approved, that would leave some \$17,000 to be collected through further fund raising in the private sector

In other matters, Council:

— Approved a low bid of \$9,400 for the raising of manholes and water valves along city streets resurfaced under the LARP X project.

The bid comes in some \$2,000 under the original engineer's estimate of the cost and was awarded to Standard Contractors.

— Approved payment of \$5,000 payment for emergency roof repairs to Mathis Auditorium.

The damages occurred during a severe storm in early August and costs

a total of \$11,381 to repair. The city's insurance covered the balance of \$6,381.

— Adopted an Equal Employment Opportunity policy statement to enhance the city's personnel regulations.

The provisions of the policy are a result of a study of the city's hiring and promotion statistics and increase employee records monitoring, establishes an employee advisory council and makes department heads, division chiefs and supervisors re-

sponsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the policy.

— Approved an annexation and rezoning request for property at 1711 Madison Highway belonging to Herbert E. Taylor. The 1.1 acre area would be zoned R-10 and is to be developed as residential property.

— Named Police Patrolman Robin Mott as Employee of the Month. Officer Mott is credited with saving the life of a child who was choking on a marble lodged in its throat.



Double Your Fun

Reading is twice the fun when shared with a friend as Antony Williams, 8, and April Denson, 2, learned when they picked up books at the Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) giveaway Wednesday at the Child Health Association of

Lowndes County in Hudson Dockett. About 200 books were given to area children, said resigning co-ordinator Willie Houseal. Houseal is to be replaced by Wanda Denson. (Times Staff Photo by Bob Lupinek)

From Page 1-A

where their children are turned up shocking results.

"In nine out of 10 of the calls, children answered the phone and said they didn't know where their parents were. It's true in the black and white community," Spray said. "I don't want to overshadow drugs. They're here. They're all around us. But it is not true that drugs are the whole problem."

"And law enforcement singly is not the answer, it can never be. A solution depends on the whole community, a community involvement through a concentrated education effort. We are popular targets but a lot of times there is something the public could do to help. Everybody has a little part to do with it."

Lowndes County Sheriff G. Robert Carter said the problem of continuing

and escalating black-on-black crime can be traced to a failure of the court system.

"The problem is in the courts. We catch them and then the charges are reduced, for whatever reason. Many times victims will not testify or go through the courts. They should be able to have enough confidence in the system to know it will work for them. But many times it seems they would rather take care of it themselves."

"Some black leaders have complained about charges being reduced. Murder is murder is murder they say. Education is a key to solving part of the problem, but if a lot more of them thought the criminal justice system would work for them, black-on-black crime could be reduced."

Councilman Vickers agrees with Carter and said the

sentences for black-on-black crime. There is a big difference in the sentences handed down for blacks through the judicial system. This needs to be done on a more even basis.

"Often there is just a little slap on the wrist for the criminal in black-on-black crime. And often the death penalty is not sought in black-on-black homicide."

Spray, Vickers, Houseal and others in the group agree more police visibility in the known areas of drug trafficking and use and around other spots in the city would help reduce crime.

However, the manpower of the department is not up to the according to Spray.

A new departmental supplement budget is under consideration and result in additional officers. expected to help is the formation of a city/county drug squad.

But still the question remains whether drugs create the instability the community or the instability of the community leads to an ever increasing dependency on drugs as an easy route that in turn destroys the strengths of the community.

2/10/87

Crime Group Moving Toward Solutions

Raising Level Of Public Awareness

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

The group effort aimed at reducing black-on-black crime in Valdosta has moved beyond the planning stage with four sub-groups taking the effort into the community.

Valdosta City Councilman Willie Houseal, one of 15 people attending a weekend organizational meeting, said a good cross-section of the black community was represented.

"We feel the key is to raise the consciousness level of the public by keeping it (information from the

group) in front of them," Houseal said. "We can't just sit back and continue doing what we're doing to ourselves. Every black-on-black crime is a crime against ourselves."

Much of the violent black-on-black crime has resulted from domestic problems thought to be out of the reach of most programs. Houseal said the new group here is not sure its efforts will be any more successful than others in reducing violent reactions within domestic situations.

"We may not see results right away," Houseal said. "But, we are not just going to be here for a few months.

We're going to continue for as long as it takes."

The original members of the group are divided into four subcommittees and given the responsibility of meeting the initial recruiting goals.

Houseal said one of the subcommittees will approach city and county government agencies while another will concentrate on reaching the public and civic groups through educational programs.

The other two committees will focus primarily on public relations efforts through the media and on raising funds.

The government, media, education and finance subcommittees also in-

clude members who are designated as block captains in an extension of the Neighborhood Crime Watch program already in effect across much of the city.

These leaders will take the program to their neighborhoods and also be involved in the recruiting efforts.

The first stage is expected to last a month with a committee meeting slated for mid-March. At that meeting the subcommittees will report the findings of the first sweeps through the community.

"We're not in the planning stages anymore. We're in the working stage," Houseal said. "We seem to have things rolling now."

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From Page 1-A

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Councilman Vickers agrees with Carter and said, "we need more harsh

sentences for black-on-black crime. There is a big difference in the sentences handed down for blacks through the judicial system. This needs to be done on a more even basis.

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Black Crime Program Developing

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

1/13/87

Another step toward implementing a program aimed at reducing black-on-black crime has been taken by the small group at the center of efforts to reduce the number of incidents in Valdosta.

Rev. Willie Frank Wade and about 15 members of the leadership that is developing Valdosta's efforts, Councilmen Bunnis Williams, Willie Houseal and Sonny Vickers among them, heard statistics and background reports on a similar program established in Albany.

The group here plans an intense awareness program patterned after the "Say No To Drugs" campaign that has been termed successful in its efforts to change attitudes toward drug use.

The Albany program started in the same way Valdosta's is developing with volunteers gathering force and manpower before going into the community with details and to recruit.

"We moved into another phase here by establishing the start of committees," Houseal said. "We are not going to limit this program to blacks. We will go throughout the community realizing that crime has no racial barriers."

Houseal said that he, Williams and Vickers had been asked to lead the local efforts in developing the program because of their visibility in the community.

In the beginning stages of the program the efforts will be concentrated in the churches with committee members going into the community with different types of awareness tools such as signs and bumper stickers. Houseal and Williams said such a program has had positive results in other cities around the country.

"Black-on-black crime is everywhere across the nation," Houseal said. "We are not being picked on here by crime."

Williams said the organization now has to bring in a wider cross-section of the black community if it is to be successful. Later, city and federal funds will be requested.

"The program will probably operate on a volunteer basis for two or three years," Williams said. "The first stage is to create an awareness of the problem. I used to think most of the black-on-black crime was drug related, but it's deeper than drugs."

That point is verified by the number of violent crimes by blacks on blacks in Valdosta during 1986. Valdosta Police Chief Charlie Spray said of the record number of homicides in the city none were proven to be drug related.

In almost all instances, the violence stemmed from a deteriorated domestic situation.

The program hopes to reach into the community to make people aware of how severe the problem is and to show techniques used in handling domestic crises without resorting to violence.

Sub-Standard House Inspires Drive For City Code Changes

By ANNY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

Moving sub-standard houses into established neighborhoods in Valdosta and the absence of a time limit for bringing the houses up to standard has angered residents of Continental Drive, and they want the city to do something about it.

"A house should be conducive to the community it is moved into," said City Councilman Willie Houseal, who represents the district.

The structure which has angered the residents of the area was moved to Hedgewood Circle in the first part of the year by Betty L. Galtier. Since the single-family residence met the requirements for lot size, it was allowed to be placed on the lot even though it is a sub-standard structure, said Houseal. The owner of the home was brought up on charges at Valdosta Municipal Court last Friday.

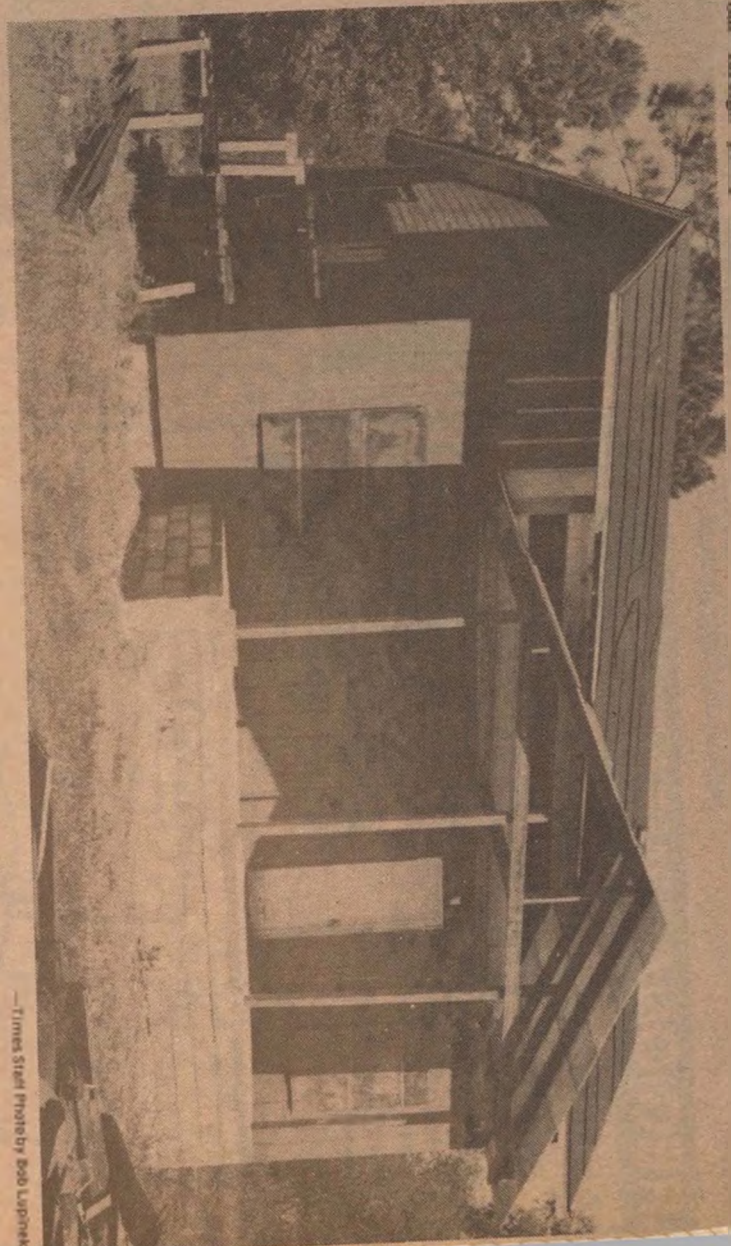
department. Brought to court for numerous violations, the owner was given a suspended sentence and now has 45 days to correct the problems with the home, said Baly.

According to Houseal, a problem exists when a substandard structure may be moved into an area with \$65-70,000 homes.

"This house was a shabby, dilapidated, old barn. These people who own homes in the area don't deserve that," said Houseal.

Houseal wants the city ordinance amended to include a time limit to bring a structure up to standard and wants the inspections department to take a closer look before a house is allowed to be moved into the area.

"I believe it is inspections' fault for allowing that substandard house to be placed there," said Houseal. Houseal wants to go further than just amending the ordinance. He wants the



—Times Staff Photo by Bob Lupton

House On Hedgewood Circle Caused Neighborhood Residents To Ask City Code Be Changed

Residents of all Valdosta communities to have input into how the individual neighborhoods are developed.

"I would like for us to establish neighborhood zoning committees here to work in conjunction with the Plan-

ing Commission and the inspections department. I want to bring people more into the process. Right now, the citizens don't have that opportunity." Houseal said this type of

neighborhood involvement has been used successfully in other cities. "Our goal is to protect the established neighborhoods from this type of thing happening again," he said.

Salvation Army

The Valdosta Daily Times, Mon., Jan. 11, 1988 3

7 Dedicated

Outward Christian workers" filled the chapel of the new Salvation Army Corps building at 320 Smithland Place during Sunday's dedication of the facility.

The expansion, which has been in the planning stages since 1984, included the addition of a 6,000 square-foot activities center, a 7,000 square-foot corps community center and a soon to be constructed 4,000 square-foot emergency shelter building for transient lodging.

At Sunday's dedication Territorial Commissioner James Osborne said Valdosta was a caring community as evidenced by the construction of the new facility from donated funds.

"This carefully constructed building makes us proud and humble. This stands as a further tribute to the unfailing support of the community," said Osborne.

In addition to Osborne, speakers for Sunday's program included Ed Crane, chairman of the capital campaign, Lt. Frank Waggoner, commanding officer of the Valdosta Corps and Willie Houseal, mayor pro tem of Valdosta.

"Thank you for making us a part of your dream," Houseal said.

Valdosta City Council intervened on behalf of the Salvation Army giving permission for the old Temple Israel building to be torn down so that the new facility could be built.

Waggoner said the \$500,000 facility was built from community donations and that many of the furnishings have also been donated.

Ground was broken Sunday following the dedication ceremony for the Red Shield Lodge which will house 20 transient men, up to three families and

six single women at one time. The lodge will be located behind the new facility.

Church services, recreation activities and a social services program will all be operated from the Smithland building.

The Salvation Army Thrift Store on 123 N. Ashley St. and the transient lodge on 208 E. Magnolia St. will remain open, said Waggoner.

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By AMY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

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City OKs Temporary Personnel Policy

By LUTHENE BUSH
Times Staff Writer

The police department's hiring and promotions policies will come under closer scrutiny after Valdosta City Council adopted an equal employment opportunity policy Thursday night.

The adoption of the policy grew out of a suit filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by black police officers.

City Councilman Willie Houseal said today the policy is "not just for blacks, it will be for some whites that have

partments actions and make recommendations to implement the success of the policy.

Nichols will be serving as the police department liaison with law enforcement agencies, minority organizations, community programs and other agencies promoting equal employment opportunity.

He will be in charge of keeping the mayor and council informed as to the developments of the program.

City Manager Mike Cason will in turn monitor Nichols and the department to assure the program's success.

been here for a long time and have not received a promotion." He said women are also included in the plans for equal employment within the department.

The new policy helps to break a logjam which developed after the suit was filed. Several supervisory positions were vacant but could not be filled. A temporary agreement was reached earlier to allow for promotions pending the approval of the equality policy.

The policy requires the department to recruit, hire, and promote employees without regard to race or

An analysis conducted earlier of the department's hiring and promotion practices indicated black police officers in the ranks above patrolman were underrepresented.

Houseal, a member of the committee drafting the policy, said after the suit was filed against the city, City Council was told by Federal Judge Wilbur Owens to adopt an affirmative action program assuring women and minorities of equal employment chances.

He said the analysis showed blacks were "top heavy" in administration jobs in the city's maintenance de-

partment but only had a ratio of "10 to 15 percent" in the police and other city departments.

Benefits, compensation, transfers, layoffs, recalls, training programs, education, tuition assistance, and social recreation programs are to be administered without discrimination.

Tom Nichols, personnel director of the city, was appointed equal employment opportunity coordinator. Nichols will monitor the police de-

partment but only had a ratio of "10 to 15 percent" in the police and other city departments.

The policy adopted Thursday is only temporary, it will be phased out as soon as the department is brought up to par, Houseal said.

The city will then adopt a permanent equal employment opportunity policy being drawn up by a department of the University of Georgia.

Houseal said Valdosta is not the only city in Georgia having to implement these new guidelines in hiring and promotions.

Spotlights Minorities

Sept 86

Employment Amendment Proposed

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

Valdosta's employment policy soon may be amended for the first time.

If approved by Valdosta City Council, the amendment will be the first to that policy and will be the city's version of affirmative action, according to Councilman Willie Houseal.

Primary author of the amendment, Houseal presented a 33-page study of the city's employment and promotion procedures to Council in June. A committee consisting of Houseal, Jimmy Rainwater and Bette Bechtel was formed to review the study and present its findings in a report to Council.

What has resulted is an amendment that calls for job applicant profiles that show race and sex as an aid in pointing out problem areas that may exist with the hiring and promotion of minorities.

"I hope this policy will raise the consciousness level about equal opportunity in the work force. The people will do the rest," Houseal said. "This

policy amendment will enhance what we already have in place."

Within the amendment are listings of responsibility in the implementation of the policy. The mayor, city council, city manager and personnel director carry the major responsibilities and are asked to also stress the importance of equal employment opportunity to all Valdosta citizens.

The amendment states the city manager should place a priority on filling upper-level supervisory, managerial, and executive positions with minority employees, wherever possible.

The personnel director is given specific responsibility for developing policy statements, internal and external communication procedures, analysing employment data, identifying problem areas and setting up programs to achieve the goals of the policy.

He will also serve as chairman for the employee advisory committee at its quarterly meeting.

Houseal said the new policy would

not include any specific time frame for completion of announced goals.

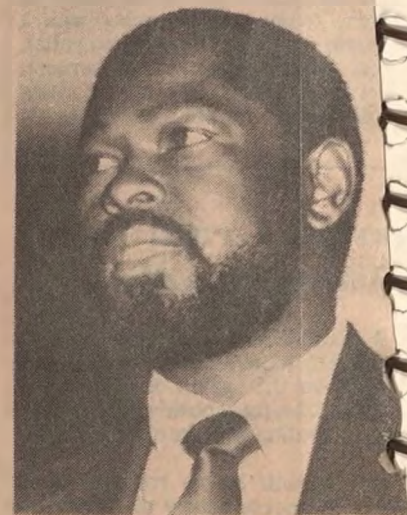
"The four-year time frame of the existing policy has been eliminated with the amendment," he said. "It may take longer to implement due to the small turnover of city employees — there just aren't many openings. In the short term, the emphasis will be on hiring minorities and women.

"This amendment does not carry a stipulation for a recruitment effort, that has already been implemented by the personnel department."

The amendment also calls for EEO performance evaluations of all department heads, division chiefs and supervisors by the city manager.

While neither a time frame nor recruitment effort is specified in the amendment, it does carry a stipulation that "the city of Valdosta must recognize that all goals, intermediate targets and time frames are objectives to be pursued by mobilization of all available resources for an ongoing good faith effort."

The amendment will be brought



WILLIE HOUSEAL
City Council Member

before Council at the first court meeting in October, Houseal said.

Spot Zoning In Spotlight In City Council Hearings

By AMY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

Spot zoning in Valdosta was the main issue of two public hearings on rezoning at Valdosta City Council Thursday with one spot zoning request approved and one rejected.

A rezoning request from Shirley B. Perlman for 1.76 acres of undeveloped property located at 2412 N. Oak Street was approved by Council because of the unusual circumstance of the request.

The neighbors adjoining the Perlman property signed a petition asking for the property to be rezoned from residential (R-15) to office-professional (O-P).

"In the three years I've been up here, I have never seen unanimity (in a neighborhood)," said Councilman David Drumheller.

Drumheller added the owners have not been able to sell the lot for

residential use, and with a professional office, the employees would not be in the office in the evening or on weekends.

Real estate agent for the property, Steve Lincoln, told Council that the Perlmans have owned the property for 10 years and don't wish to develop it with residential homes or rental property.

One resident, who lives near the property, spoke against the rezoning request expressing concern that a professional office would ruin the character of the neighborhood.

However, Council approved the request because of the support of the 15 neighbors who signed the petition for the rezoning.

"Council in the past has turned down this type of zoning, but it is unusual because of the support. Let the will of the people speak," said Councilman Sonny Vickers.

Two members of Council, Bette Bechtel and Willie Houseal, voted

against the rezoning.

"If this is rezoned, I do think we need to be prepared to rezone other property on Oak Street (to office use)," said Mrs. Bechtel.

"We have tried to unify zoning so everything could be contiguous. I've have a hard time letting it be spot zoned," said Houseal.

However, Council reiterated its position against spot zoning by denying a request by Willie Shumphard to rezone from residential (R-6s) to residential (R-6) 1.1784 acres of property located at Woodgate Drive between Morningside Drive and Hedgewood Circle.

"You are talking about a clear case of spot zoning here," said Drumheller.

The property was rezoned to R-6s in 1985 to allow only single family homes in the neighborhood. With the R-6, duplexes, apartments and single family homes could be placed on the property which is surrounded by single family homes in Woodgate subdivision.

More Park Funds To Be Considered By City

The Valdosta Daily Times, Wed., Mar. 4, 1987 5-A

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times City Editor

A request for additional money to pay for the completion of renovations at Sunset Park will come before Valdosta City Council Thursday night.

The request from Parks and Recre-

ation Director Dave Christian calls for \$12,400 in additional funding for the budgeted ballfield project.

The \$64,900 project cost has been reduced through donations of materials and through the use of departmental labor in beginning the renovations, leaving the total cost to be funded at

\$42,400.

A budget allocation of \$30,000 for the project leaves the balance requested by Christian. The money requested would come from \$17,341 in money slated to go back into the city's general fund for allocation next budget year.

The request for the Sunset Park field at the Council work session Tuesday night raised questions on the future of Scott Park, located in the southeastern part of the city.

Councilman Willie Houseal asked Christian what needed to be done at Scott Park.

"It needs the same things I've been asking for for 10 years," Christian said.

"Do you know what we might do to speed that project along?" Houseal

asked.

"Budget it," Christian said.

Christian told Council his department is under insurmountable pressure from the community to offer more space for softball and baseball with Scott Park being used on the weekends as much as any park in the city.

The baseball field at Scott Park has been the subject of some debate concerning the possibility that it be renovated and used for softball. Negative response from the community appears to have stopped that plan.

Houseal asked Christian and Council to consider renovations at Scott.

"We need to do something about it in the next couple of years for sure," Houseal said.

In other matters, Council will:

— Elect a mayor pro tem.

— Consider three names for an appointment to the Valdosta Tree Commission R. Mike Talbott, Edward Barnett and John Youmans are nominated for the slot.

— Consider bids on a loader for a city trash truck with a low bid of \$11,250 from SWACARS Sales Inc.

— Consider bids on a two-ton heated asphalt trailer with a low bid of \$5,147 from James Equipment Co.

— Consider bids on emergency light equipment for police cars with a low bid of \$5,280 for six light bars, \$922.35 for 65 headlight flashers and \$1,468 for 65 rear flasher units.

Garbage Workers Walk Out

By AMY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

Valdosta garbage and trash collection ground to a halt this morning when more than 125 garbage workers and trash collectors staged a walkout.

The employees told city officials they will not work until the city addresses their list of grievances when they showed up this morning at 7 a.m. at the sanitation department at 1022 Myrtle St.

The employees plan to stay there during the regular work hours until a representative of the group can meet

Cason, garbage workers are on an incentive plan which pays them for the additional houses added to the city collection routes each year.

This year a new route was added which took many customers off existing routes resulting in the lower incentive amount, Cason said.

Several garbage collectors talked to Public Works Director E.R. Brown Thursday after they received their checks, but Brown told them they would discuss the matter on Monday.

Copeland said over the weekend more than 15 of the garbage workers came by his house to talk about the cut in pay.

he received this year.

"I think I should be treated equally and get paid what I'm supposed to be paid," said Baisden.

Another grievance by the workers is the sick leave policy which allows 12 sick leave days a year. According to Baisden, when a day of sick leave is taken the employee must bring in a doctor's excuse the next day or work on Wednesday to make up the missed day.

The workers want the policy changed and this morning they began to compile a list of concerns and suggestions which will be presented to Cason.

"What we want is equal rights. We

City Sets Grievance Hearing

By AMY SWANN
Times Staff Writer

Valdosta officials will address a list of grievances submitted by disgruntled sanitation and water department employees in a closed hearing before the City Grievance Committee Thursday at 11 a.m.

Employees delayed work this morning until Valdosta City Manager Mike Cason assured them they would be paid for the time they were on strike Monday and Tuesday.

"I believe they (city officials) are going to do something about some of the complaints," said Frank Copeland, a city employee who is representing the garbage workers on the grievance committee.

Copeland, along with four other representatives of the garbage workers, will meet Thursday with Cason, Personnel Director Tom Nichols, Mayor Gill Autrey, City At-

torney George Talley and council members Sonny Vickers and Willie Houseal.

Following the hearing, the city will have five working days to respond to the workers' request, said Cason.

Copeland said he will try to get most of the 125 workers together following the meeting to discuss the outcome.

"If we can't get some satisfaction we'll be right back where we were on Monday," said Copeland.

At the top of the list of grievances is the matter of bonus pay. The workers claim it is unfair for new garbage routes to be created if they are penalized by the loss of bonus pay given for serving additional houses on existing routes.

Each year the workers are compensated for the number of new houses added to existing routes. According to Copeland, some of the garbage collectors received thousands of dollars in bonus last year and only a couple hundred this year.

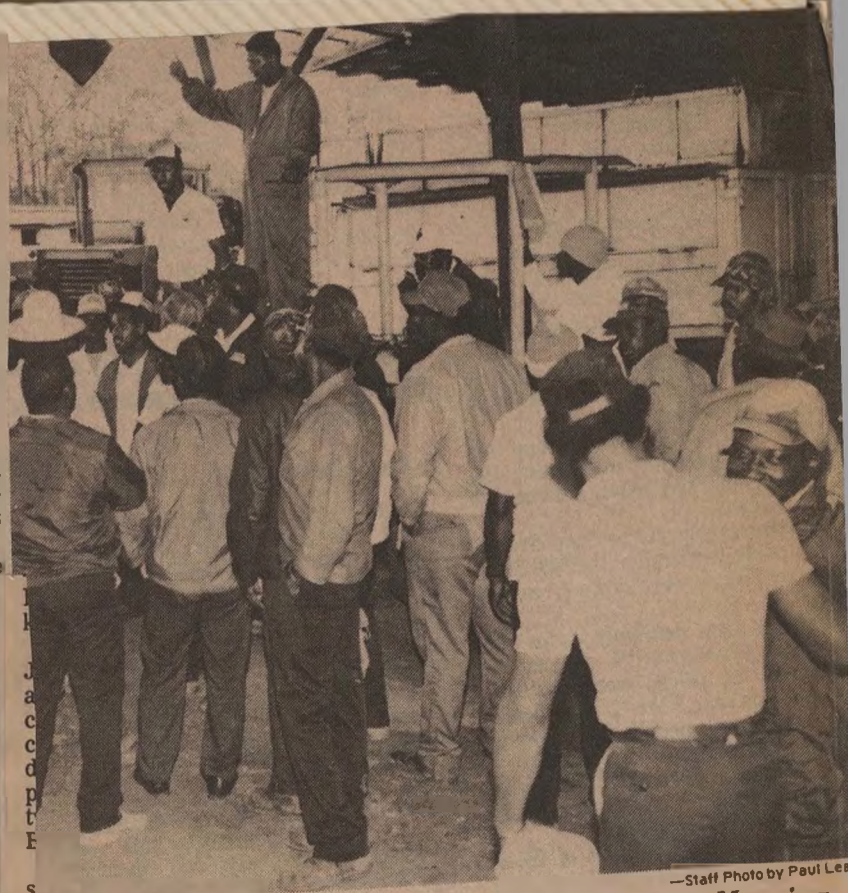
The matter of sick leave will also be addressed. The workers are given 12 sick leave days a year, but if the days are taken a doctor's excuse is requested or the worker is asked to make the day up, said Copeland.

Stricter safety precautions are also being requested and more black supervisors are needed since 90 percent of the city workers are black, the grievance list stated.

Councilman Willie Houseal said he believes the differences can be resolved at Thursday's meeting.

"The grievances will be dealt with accordingly and we will try to reach a satisfactory point with the city and the city employees," said Houseal.

City workers staged a walkout on Monday refusing at that time to work until their representatives could meet with Mayor Autrey. The walkout ended on Tuesday when the agreement for Thursday's meeting was reached.



—Staff Photo by Paul Lee

Striked Garbage Workers Refused To Work Monday Morning

Garbage Workers Return

By MARY ELLEN CANNINGTON
Times Staff Writer

City garbage workers are back on the job today after staging a walkout Monday over pay and work policy disputes, according to city officials.

A meeting will be held Thursday morning to address a list of grievances 125 city employees have presented.

The work halt began Monday after workers said they had five pay that had not been listed about 30 days ago. Mayor Gill said he was pleased and appointed representatives to meet with the workers and reach an agreement to be reached.

Willie Houseal, city manager and sanitation director, met this morning to discuss the terms of the agreement. He said the city will pay the workers the same as other city employees.

Copeland, a representative of the workers, said a meeting will be held today to discuss the terms of the agreement. He said the city will pay the workers the same as other city employees.

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of 24 demands will be met. He said the city will pay the workers the same as other city employees.

He said Monday they will meet with the city officials to discuss the terms of the agreement.

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Garbage Workers Walk Out

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Times Staff Writer

Valdosta garbage and trash collection ground to a halt this morning when more than 125 garbage workers and trash collectors staged a walkout.

The employees told city officials they will not work until the city addresses their list of grievances when they showed up this morning at 7 a.m. at the sanitation department at 1022 Myrtle St.

The employees plan to stay there during the regular work hours until a representative of the group can meet with Mayor Gill Autrey.

"They said they don't want to work until they get this straightened out," said Frank Copeland, a city employee who is representing the workers as a member of the grievance committee.

One of the foremost concerns of the workers is a cut in incentive pay in the end of the year checks received last week.

According to City Manager Mike

Cason, garbage workers are on an incentive plan which pays them for the additional houses added to the city collection routes each year.

This year a new route was added which took many customers off existing routes resulting in the lower incentive amount, Cason said.

Several garbage collectors talked to Public Works Director E.R. Brown Thursday after they received their checks, but Brown told them they would discuss the matter on Monday.

Copeland said over the weekend more than 15 of the garbage workers came by his house to talk about the cut in pay.

"One man got \$3,400 last year and \$800 this year. We want the city to explain what the difference is," said Copeland.

One of the garbage collectors, Eugene Baisden, said last year he received a check for \$1,100 and although he had to pay back part of it since taxes were not deducted, he said it was substantially more than the \$273

he received this year.

"I think I should be treated equally and get paid what I'm supposed to be paid," said Baisden.

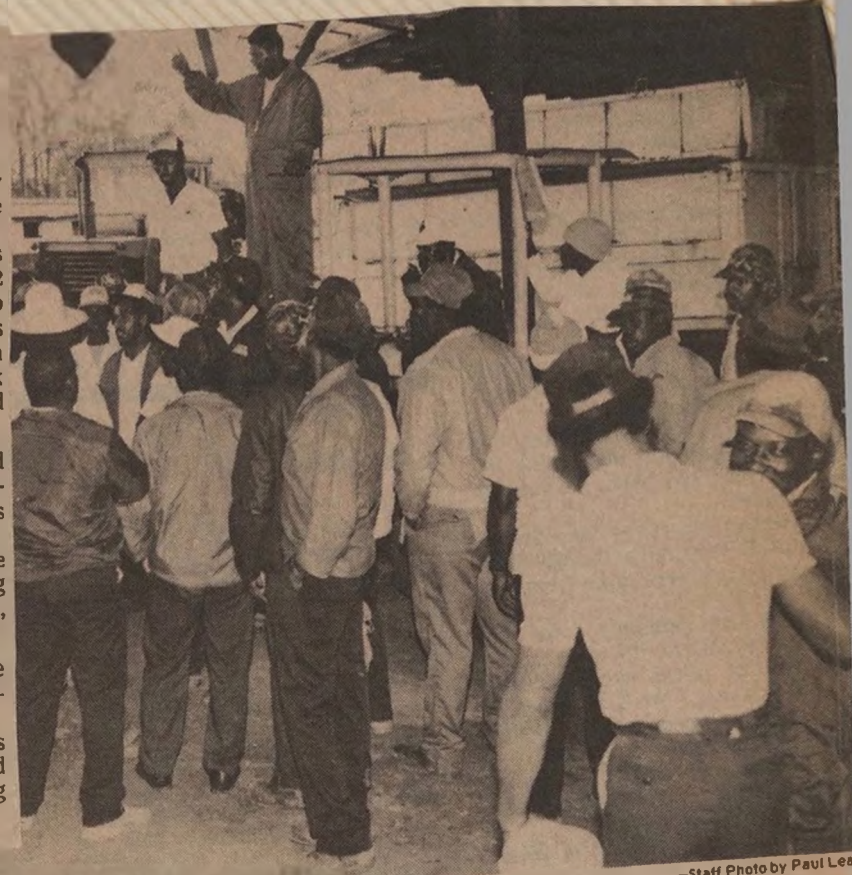
Another grievance by the workers is the sick leave policy which allows 12 sick leave days a year. According to Baisden, when a day of sick leave is taken the employee must bring in a doctor's excuse the next day or work on Wednesday to make up the missed day.

The workers want the policy changed and this morning they began to compile a list of concerns and suggestions which will be presented to Cason.

"What we want is equal rights. We want better pay and better working conditions," said Leon Jefferson, garbage collector.

Between 700-800 customers were scheduled to have their garbage collected today.

Cason asked the employees this morning to file a formal grievance and to go back to work until a meeting could be held on the matter.



—Staff Photo by Paul Lea

More Than 125 Disgruntled Garbage Workers Refused To Work Monday Morning

Garbage Workers Return

By MARY ELLEN CANNINGTON
Times Staff Writer

City garbage workers are back on the job today after staging a walkout Monday over pay and work policy disputes, according to city officials.

A meeting will be held Thursday morning to address a list of grievances 125 city employees have presented.

The work halt began Monday after some sanitation workers said they had not received incentive pay that had been promised and listed about 30 grievances. During the day Mayor Gill Autrey and other elected and appointed city officials met with the workers and at least a temporary agreement to return to work was reached.

Mayor pro tem Willie Houseal, city manager Mike Cason and sanitation department heads met this morning to discuss the problems garbage collectors say stem from cuts in pay and sick leave policy.

Employee Frank Copeland, a representative for the city workers, said a primary concern is a cut in incentive pay in end of the year checks distributed last week. Garbage workers are paid additional sums when houses are added to their routes, Cason said. This year, the incentive pay is lower because a new route was added taking many customers off existing routes, he said.

Another grievance that will come before the committee Thursday will concern the city sick leave policy requiring employees to bring a doctor's excuse for missed days.

Houseal said a list of 24 demands will be considered at the meeting, although he cannot make any promises.

"We're not saying everything will be given to them, but everything will be considered. The grievances will be dealt with accordingly and we will try to reach a satisfactory point with the city and county," he said.

The workers were told Monday they must return to work today or lose the chance to have their grievances aired. Houseal said by not coming to work, the employees were blocking due process.

"We will try to resolve the matter tomorrow."

Mayor Gill Autrey was unavailable for comment.

If the trash continued to pile up, Houseal said the city could hire an independent company to do the job.

Houseal Favored As Mayor Pro Tem

By **ERNIE ROGERS**
Times Staff Writer

The voting lines are thinly drawn in the quiet, internal, council positioning for the office of Valdosta's mayor pro tem.

● Incumbent Jimmy Rainwater, obliged by a vote of Council taken one year ago Friday to step down from the office after one year, is not anxious to surrender what were the fruits of

having waged and won the battle for the at-large city council seat.

● Bette Bechtel, a previous two-term mayor pro tem, has had her name tossed into the roughly drawn ring. But, she has said she does not want the post for a third year and appears to favor the front runner giving him the fourth and probably deciding vote.

● Willie Houseal, one of the leaders in last year's negotiations that led to the one-year term for mayor pro tem, does want the job and appears to have the

necessary votes.

Houseal was nominated, along with Bechtel, David Drumheller and Bunnis Williams, in the four rounds of nominating and voting that ushered in the new council March 6, 1986 and ended with the compromise on term length and Rainwater's election.

Rainwater, while reluctant to give up the post, does not want a repeat of the confusion and strife of last year's vote that led Mayor Gill Autrey to call a five-minute recess in the new council's

first meeting and caucus with councilmembers in a back-room session.

Rainwater had been expecting a clear vote of support on the first ballot, but the still loosely-structured coalition of councilmembers Williams, Houseal, Bechtel and Sonny Vickers left the matter in the air after three votes.

The fourth in the series of nominations and votes, coming after the negotiations, had Rainwater

nominated without opposition and elected unanimously.

The election Thursday night is not expected to spill over into a backroom session. Houseal comes into the meeting with four votes apparently secure.

Only an abstention on the part of one of Houseal's supporters could throw the vote toward Rainwater or toward a possible motion to have the one-year term requirement rescinded leaving the mayor pro tem office as a perk for the winner of the at-large council seat.

Council Should Approve Funds For Backup Judge

Valdosta City Council is going to consider soon a change so that a lawyer will be used at city court when the recorder's court judge is unable to attend. It makes sense. Current practice is to use the mayor pro tem.

The most serious aspect is purely and simply a legal one. The mayor pro tem is not a lawyer, he or she is a member of City Council. The chances of a lawyer running for the office changes each time but we haven't had one in recent years.

Recorder's court is a court of law. The person sitting on the bench should

court of law then what is it? It is a court of law.

Another reason for relieving the mayor pro tem of the job is a simple matter of practical politics. Those are his voters facing the mayor pro tem. They know he isn't a lawyer or judge, they know he is "their" city councilman. It isn't fair to the politician. Superior Court judges are elected. But they are elected to be judges, have already attained official lawyer status and the people in front of the bench understand the judge is the judge.

There has been some silly politicking about this

Council Agenda Heavy Without Internal Fight

Several stories have appeared in this newspaper concerning the election of a mayor pro tem by Valdosta City Council. An obvious question is and should be: what is the big deal about being the member of Council who presides when the mayor is absent or fills in for the mayor at other functions? As usual, there is more involved.

The majority of people who run for and get elected to City Council harbor a wish sooner or later to become mayor. The higher visibility they have the better their chance at becoming mayor.

Councilman Jimmy Rainwater, elected to the at-large post, seems to have thoughts of running for mayor when Gill Autrey leaves the post. Autrey reportedly wants at least one more term.

Councilman Willie Houseal, the first black to hold the post of mayor pro tem, wants the post perhaps for the same

reason.

There is nothing wrong with political ambition. It would be refreshing if those who want posts such as mayor pro tem would stand up and say "This would help me in my potential race for mayor in the future."

It is almost certain that some negotiations among members of Council took place last year and this year out of hearing and sight of the public concerning the mayor pro tem post.

With the problems facing our city and with the ambitious programs advanced by Autrey and his administration Council and the community would be better served now if all concerned would buckle down to the job and quit worrying about who is going to be what in future years.

There is ample work for the community to be done right now by Valdosta City Council.

surrender what were the fruits of want the job and appears to have the five-minute recess in the new council's negotiations, had some councilmen after the Rainwater the winner of the at-large council seat.

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The most serious aspect is purely and simply a legal one. The mayor pro tem is not a lawyer, he or she is a member of City Council. The chances of a lawyer running for the office changes each time but we haven't had one in recent years.

Recorder's court is a court of law. The person sitting on the bench should have formal legal training just as in any other court of law. We have eliminated the justices of the peace tradition and a city the size of Valdosta doesn't need a politician without legal training sitting as judge in a court of law. If it isn't a

court of law then what is it? It is a court of law.

Another reason for relieving the mayor pro tem of the job is a simple matter of practical politics. Those are his voters facing the mayor pro tem. They know he isn't a lawyer or judge, they know he is "their" city councilman. It isn't fair to the politician. Superior Court judges are elected. But they are elected to be judges, have already attained official lawyer status and the people in front of the bench understand the judge is the judge.

There has been some silly politicking about this matter. It is time to stop the foolishness and treat the matter as a serious one. The taxpayers can and should be willing to afford the small amount it will take to pay a lawyer when the part-time judge is unavailable.

Houseal Elected Mayor Pro Tem

By ERNIE ROGERS
Times Staff Writer

The election of Valdosta's mayor pro tem was accomplished Thursday night with one nomination and a unanimous vote by Council.

"I nominate Willie Houseal for mayor pro tem," said Councilman Sonny Vickers.

"I move the nominations be closed," said Councilman David Drumheller, immediately.

Council approved the motion and Houseal became Valdosta's first black mayor pro tem by acclamation.

Words of congratulation to Houseal and gratitude to Councilman Jimmy Rainwater, who held the post for one year, filled the last few minutes of the meeting.

"Jimmy Rainwater has been a big help to me," said Mayor Gill Autrey of the man who held the post for the past year. "He probably attended 30 percent of the functions the mayor was asked to attend."

That frequency of service demand has been discussed in and out of Houseal's camp as a concern. A question as to whether Houseal will be regularly available to effectively serve in the post continues to be asked.

Houseal discounts those concerns and said he expects to have the time necessary in meeting the demands of the job.

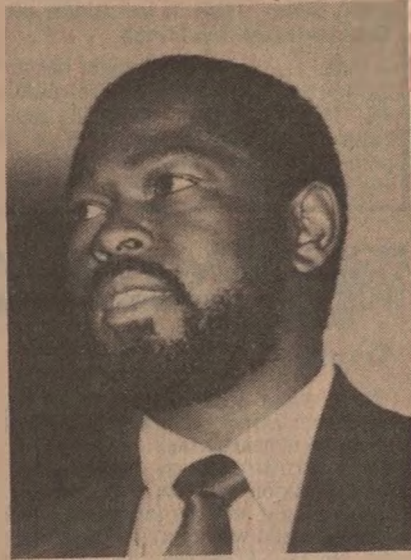
Being mayor pro tem places more responsibility on me as a servant of the city," Houseal said. "I am available each morning and on Fridays. I'm pretty sure I'll work it out."

"The experience will be gratifying to me. I feel fortunate that my colleagues put their trust in me."

The agreeable mood of Council in smoothly electing Houseal to a one-year term followed a path charted during last year's negotiated election of Councilman Jimmy Rainwater to the post.

Rainwater had expected to be elected mayor pro tem last year as a matter of course after winning the at-large seat on Council. The course wound around a move to limit the term of the mayor pro tem to one year — a move aimed at ensuring that one of the newly elected black councilman would have an opportunity to hold the office.

Negotiations to limit the term began with three blocked efforts to elect Rainwater at the first meeting of the new council one year ago today. Mayor Gill Autrey was forced to recess that meeting and lead further, less public and strident negotiations among councilmembers that resulted in an



WILLIE HOUSEAL

agreement on the one-year term and in the unanimous election of Rainwater on the fourth vote.

An effort to avoid another prolonged confrontation that could have damaged the internal workings of Council eased Houseal into the post he had eyed for the past year.

Rainwater said the business of government and the more important priorities of Council could not be sidetracked by council politics.

However, there is evidence that a cordial brand of internal politics lingers in the wings amid speculation that the term of mayor pro tem could be expanded to two years starting with the 1988 election. Rainwater is expected to seek the post for a second term.

Council To Hire Deputy Judge

By LUTHENE BUSH
Times Staff Writer

Valdosta City Council quietly passed a charter amendment Thursday night which provides funds to hire someone, preferably a lawyer, to replace the Municipal Court judge when he is absent.

It ended several months of bickering among some Council members. The charter had called for the mayor or mayor pro tem to sit in when the municipal judge was absent. The task usually fell to the mayor pro tem and this caused problems for some members of Council.

Willie Houseal, current mayor pro tem (the post rotates), and others felt it was improper for elected officials to serve as a judge of their constituents. Councilman Jimmy Rainwater disagreed and wanted the mayor pro tem to continue in the substitute judge's role.

After a heated debate during the first reading of the amendment two weeks ago, the matter was disposed of quietly Thursday night on a split vote. The measure passed with Rainwater voting against and Dr. Richard Winston abstaining. Councilman David Drumheller was absent.

Bunnis Williams, who made the motion Thursday to adopt the amendment, said two weeks ago, the case load of the court is more complex and involves more than just a decision of innocence or guilt.

Sonny Vickers, one of the sponsors of the amendment, said City Council should observe a separation of powers which couldn't be done as long as the Mayor pro tem was serving as the substitute judge.