

March 14, 2019 City Council Workshop

Savannah City Government

SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES

COUNCIL WORK SESSION & CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING

March 14, 2019 – 10:00 a.m.

The workshop of Council was held at 10:02 a.m. in the second floor media room of City Hall.

PRESENT: Mayor Eddie DeLoach, Presiding

Aldermen: Carol Bell, Julian Miller, Brian Foster, Bill Durrence, John Hall, Van Johnson, II, Tony Thomas, Estella Shabazz

Rob Hernandez, City Manager

Jen Herman, Interim City Attorney

Bret Bell, Assistant to the City Manager

William Shearouse, Assistant City Attorney

City Manager Hernandez welcomed everyone to the meeting and welcomed Mark Massey, Clerk of Council to the City of Savannah.

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. West Gwinnett Street and DeLesseps Avenue Roadway Improvement Projects](#)

[Exhibit 1: ROW Acquisitions Presentation.pdf](#)

David Keating, Director of the Real Estate Services Department, discussed the West Gwinnett Street and DeLesseps Avenue roadway improvement projects. The West Gwinnett Street widening project is necessary to handle the increased traffic at the City's new arena, the roads will be widened to four lanes out of the flood plain, and add a bridge across the canal. The DeLesseps Avenue widening project extends from Waters Avenue to Skidaway Road and it will add curbs and gutters, five foot sidewalks, four foot bicycle lanes, and improve drainage.

Mr. Keating briefly explained the difference between fee simple acquisition and acquisition in terms of easements.

Eric Chin, Real Estate Officer, briefly reviewed a summary of the acquisition process.

Alderman Thomas expressed his concerns about the tree canopy associated with the DeLesseps Avenue widening project.

At the request of Alderman Miller, Mr. Chin briefly discussed the steps taken to contact property owners.

Mr. Chin then explained the purpose of the resolution on the Council agenda this afternoon.

Alderman Johnson informed Council that he could not support the eminent domain resolution on the Council agenda because some of the residents involved are unaware this was occurring today. He believes the process is disingenuous and should be used as a last resort.

Alderwoman Bell expressed her concerns as to whether the process was properly communicated with the owners. She stated she believes it is very necessary for the property owners to be aware of the processes and that the message is clear because people get fearful when they hear the words eminent domain.

Alderman Johnson stated West Gwinnett Street is a little misleading because there are also properties located on Stiles Avenue.

Alderman Thomas stated he could never support a blanket document on the use of eminent domain. If staff gets to a point where they cannot go any further with a property owner it should be brought back to Council in an Executive Session to be discussed.

City Manager Hernandez stated eminent domain is a tool of last resort and staff is at that point certainly on West Gwinnett Street with several properties due to cloudy titles and the unwillingness of some property owners. Alderman Thomas suggested the items should be presented to Council in an Executive Session individually and then a decision can be made by the body.

Alderwoman Shabazz expressed her disapproval of the eminent domain process.

Alderman Hall informed Council that he wants to move forward with the properties associated with the DeLesseps Avenue widening project.

Attorney Herman informed Council there isn't anything that legally limits them from approving the resolution giving staff blanket authority, however she believes the wiser course would be to do it property by property.

Mr. Chin informed Alderman Johnson that he would reach out to the two property owners that are uneasy today.

[2. Forsyth Park Master Plan Update](#)

[Exhibit 1: Forsyth Park Master Plan Presentation.pdf](#)

Gordon Denney, Director of the City of Savannah's Greenscapes Division introduced Eleanor Rhangos and Meb Ryan with the Trustees' Garden Club who presented the Forsyth Park master plan update.

Ms. Rhangos provided information on the history of the Trustee's Garden Club. During the presentation she stated the four project elements which included:

- Overarching Values and guidelines for treatment of Forsyth Park (completed)
- Cultural Landscape Report (Q-2, 2019)
- Master Plan (Timing of completion TBD)
- National Historic Landmark/National Register Designation

Ms. Rhangos discussed the purpose of the park master plan which will create a vision for the future of the park and will be the result of a well-considered, inclusive process that respects both the history and change. The plan can be implemented over a number of years by coordinating the efforts of the City officials and departments, community members and potentially non-profit partners.

Ms. Ryan discussed the need for the master plan, its components and the keys to its success.

Heath Lloyd, Chief Infrastructure and Development Officer, briefly discussed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which has already been reviewed by the City Attorney's Office.

City Manager Hernandez asked Council if this was something they were interested in pursuing. Aldermen Foster stated the Trustee's Garden is a well-respected group and he looks forward to working out an agreement. Aldermen Durrence and Miller agreed.

Alderman Durrence requested the history and a copy of the MOU. Mr. Denney stated he will send the information to Council.

Alderman Foster requested an update of the Forsyth Park Café. City Manager Hernandez stated the RFP is currently being reviewed, there was a total of five submissions. He reminded Council that there is a code of silence in place at this time. Alderman Thomas requested a copy of the RFP.

City Manager Hernandez reminded Council of the issues with parking at the park and a lack of turnover in many areas which may affect the financial viability of the café. He informed Council that he would like to move forward with a proposal that would help construct the restrooms on the southside of the park.

Alderman Thomas expressed his concerns about the aggressive panhandling occurring at the park. Attorney Herman, stated she is not comfortable making a recommendation on an ordinance concerning this issue that would survive scrutiny. She added the City is not currently enforcing the panhandling ordinance and panhandling signs have been removed.

City Manager Hernandez stated he would consult with Savannah Police Chief Minter to ensure he is aware of the issues brought up by Alderman Thomas, as it relates to panhandling at the park.

Alderman Durrence asked if the separation of the restrooms from the café has occurred. City Manager Hernandez confirmed that it has been done.

Marty Johnston, Chief Operating Officer, briefly discussed parking concerns, security at the park and concerns with the restrooms. Alderman Durrence suggested looking at putting metered parking in the spaces closest to the café.

Alderman Hall expressed his concerns about panhandling throughout the City.

Alderman Thomas expressed his concerns with the parking and restrooms at the park. He asked why the City didn't work with the Kessler Group when the building was managed by them. Ms. Johnston reminded Council that the City did work with the Kessler Group on some things, but the upkeep of the restrooms was too much for them. She briefly discussed the details of the RFP.

Alderman Miller expressed his concerns about the parking at the park. He suggested having someone to document how long and often the vehicles that are utilizing the spaces are sitting.

City Manager Hernandez stated he would like to work with Chief Minter in bringing a proposal to establish a park patrol unit that would focus on the City parks that have a tremendous amount of visitors.

Mr. Lloyd thanked Mr. Denney and the Trustee's Garden Club for their collaborative efforts.

3. Real Estate, Litigation, Personnel

Upon motion of Alderman Durrence, seconded by Alderman Johnson, and unanimously carried, Council went into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing Real Estate, Litigation and Personnel.

Upon completion of this session, a motion was made to come out of Executive Session by Alderman Durrence, seconded by Alderman Miller, and unanimously carried.

The executive session began at 11:40 a.m. and ended at 1:21 p.m.

4. Agenda Review

City Manager Hernandez presented the City Manager's Briefing of the agenda items for the Council Meeting of March 14, 2019. The agenda can be found online and will be made a part of the permanent record.

The City Manager indicated that he planned to withdraw several items from the regular meeting agenda as follows: #22, #23, #29, #30, and #31.

There being no further business, Mayor DeLoach declared this meeting of Council adjourned.

The video recording of the Work Session can be found by copying and pasting the below link in your url:

<https://savannahgovtv.viebit.com/player.php?hash=sA55rDUvBccN>

Mark Massey
Clerk of Council