
March 29, 2018, Council Work Session

Savannah City Government

SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES

COUNCIL WORK SESSION & CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING

March 29, 2018 – 10:00 a.m.

Present: Mayor Eddie DeLoach, Presiding

Aldermen: Carol Bell, Julian Miller, Brian Foster, Tony Thomas, Van Johnson, II, Bill Durrence, John Hall, Estella Shabazz (arrived at 10:30 a.m.)

Rob Hernandez, City Manager

Brooks Stillwell, City Attorney

William Shearouse, Assistant City Attorney

Jennifer Herman, Deputy City Attorney

Mayor DeLoach called the meeting to order at 10:00am.

City Manager Hernandez welcomed everyone to the work session and reviewed the agenda.

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Fire Services Fee Discount Program](#)

Chief Wallace reviewed the Fire Services Fire Fee Discount Program, including: the purpose of the program, which is to support property risk reduction efforts; and the types of discounts available, including those for homeowners, commercial/industrial property owners, nonprofits, and educational properties. The discounts will be a cumulative reduction to the fee. CFO Maxwell explained that the discount will be available to everyone and is tied to the amount of safety improvements completed on your property. Each of the identified categories has several opportunities to decrease your overall bill and increase overall safety on the property. For consideration on the 2:00 agenda by City Council is a change to the 2018 revenue ordinance. He presented a summary of the fire protection fee discounts in a table and explained that every time the table of discounts is to be modified, they will have to come back to City Council for approval. There is a maximum discount of 20% for parcels, except those served by another department. To get the fire fee discount citizens will need to apply for it, similar to the Homestead Exemption, and the discount period will run from April to June of each year. This will be a defined period to get applications in to the City, which will allow time for the City to process them and get them in to the system before the bills are generated. The ordinance is up for first and second reading today so that we can begin our public education campaign to our citizens so they can begin taking the necessary steps to qualify for the discounts. The campaign will include our website at www.savannahga.gov and a dedicated phone number that goes to our fire fund team, and the applications can be dropped off or mailed to the Revenue Department. CFO Maxwell ran through a residential property example utilizing a smoke detector, extinguisher, and evacuation plan/drill resulting in a 15% discount or \$38.40 discount off a total \$256.00 fee.

Alderman Miller asked how we are going to confirm a drill has been completed. Chief Wallace said that we do not have the resources to enter every residence. On the application citizens will make a certifying statement and we will take action if necessary if we find that they have not been compliant.

Alderman Miller asked about a 100% discount if they are served by another fire department, as another fire department has released confusing information about this, suggesting you could contract with them. City Manager Hernandez discussed how they are addressing this. The authority having jurisdiction within the City limits is the City of Savannah, and therefore we cannot delegate that responsibility to another fire department. Therefore, residents cannot contract with

another department. Alderman Durrence asked that we communicate the issue of jurisdiction clearly to citizens. City Manager Hernandez reiterated that legally we have jurisdiction and we have to provide fire protection.

City Manager Hernandez reviewed the background of the fire fee and City Council's approval of the fire fee. The City will send out reminders in April advising residents of their estimated fire fee and payments will be due in the fall (September) and they will have until November to pay. Various institutions/agencies have asked what will happen if they are not able to pay this year. We will work out a payment plan and they will not be charged interest in the first year. Alderman Thomas asked for clarification regarding if the total amount will be billed in the fall. This year we are billing for the whole year, but in the last cycle. Next year we will bill in two cycles, in April and September. We are finalizing the hardship assistance program and will bring that to City Council in May 2018 and the income guidelines will be based on the HUD guidelines adjusted for family size. Applications for the discounts will be available online and in the Revenue department. Our 311 staff has been trained to deal with questions from the public. We have put together a team in the Revenue department to work on this and have set up a database for managing it. We think we are almost ready to go and this is the first of two approvals we need from you in order to move forward.

Alderman Miller asked about the hardship assistance, will it be all or nothing, or a step up type program? City Manager Hernandez said that as long as you meet the income guidelines, it is all, for ease of administration and implementation.

Alderman Hall thanked the City Manager and staff for pulling all of this together, but stressed that it is important to roll this out right and to be able to answer questions. He asked if for Houses of Worship the discount limit was 15%? The City Manager said yes, for that particular discount. Alderman Hall asked if there were any other discounts to go along with that. City Manager Hernandez said that every property has the ability to get discounts based on a menu of activities, like extinguishers and detectors, up to 20%. Praise and Preparedness participation is 15% and is just one of the discounts available on the menu. Alderman Hall also asked about school discounts. City Manager Hernandez said they can get up to 20%, based on the available discounts.

Alderman Thomas asked if the Fire Department would still give out detectors. City Manager Hernandez said yes and citizens would be given a certificate to attach to their application. Alderman Thomas asked if all of the discounts will be posted on the City's website, and the City Manager confirmed they would be.

Alderman Bell asked about Praise and Preparedness, clarifying that the maximum discount overall is 20% for any property. Alderman Bell clarified that for the hardship program there will be a structured application process. CFO Maxwell confirmed that yes and there will be an entity to review and confirm them.

2. Zoning Petitions Review

Bridget Lidy, Director of Planning and Urban Design for the City of Savannah, introduced Thomas Trawick with the Metropolitan Planning Commission. City Manager Hernandez briefly reviewed Items 3-9 on the 2:00 agenda. Mr. Trawick discussed Item 3, Live Oak Landing, LLP's request to rezone three parcels for an apartment complex that is age restricted (62 and up), 94 affordable housing units that will be conducted in two phases. They will still need to go through the design approval process. City Council will just be looking at the rezoning of this property this afternoon.

Alderman Hall asked the City Manager why he voted no. City Manager Hernandez said there was at least one representative from the surrounding neighborhood who was concerned with the proliferation of income restricted housing in the neighborhood, but he thinks it is a good project, needed elderly housing on a transportation corridor. Alderman Hall expressed some concerns because of its proximity to a school, and stressed that he is speaking as an employee of the Board of Education and he hasn't heard what the administration thinks about this project and he would ask that they have some time to comment on it. Alderman Thomas asked if they wouldn't have already done that. Mr. Trawick said that public notice was posted on the property and property owners within 300 feet of the property were notified. Alderman Bell asked Alderman Hall what he viewed as potential negative impacts of the project. Alderman Hall said he didn't know what would be the potential impacts, but that he would like MPC to reach out to the Board. Alderman Miller clarified that this is just the zoning hearing and there is time for them to reach out to the Board.

Alderman Durrence noted that whole corridor on the north side of Wheaton has income restricted housing.

City Attorney Stillwell suggested that Council could continue the zoning hearing, but let those here today speak.

City Manager Hernandez said it is designed to target residents 62 years of age and above and the impact that he foresees on the school is negligible, and access to transit is important to the project, and traffic impacts are minimal, as well. Alderman Thomas asked about market rate. City Manager Hernandez clarified that this is income restricted. Mayor DeLoach asked if they should continue the hearing. City Attorney Stillwell said they could do that, but let those who come today speak. City Manager Hernandez reminded Council that the intent of having the zonings in work session was to get City Council ready for the meeting, not to debate them in work session.

Alderman Thomas asked Mr. Trawick that if you are doing rezonings near a school you send notice to the school. Mr. Trawick responded yes.

City Attorney Stillwell reminded Council members that this is just an informational session this morning and that they should not debate the merits of any of these issues this morning, that questions for the MPC are fine, but debate should occur this afternoon during the regular meeting in the public hearing.

Alderman Johnson stated that his concern is taking it in pieces, wherever it is, and how it affects the totality and how we address zoning.

Ellen Harris, from the Metropolitan Planning Commission, spoke on Items 4 and 5 that will be on the regular meeting agenda and relate to the Ardsley Park-Chatham Crescent-Ardmore Conservation District. The Ardsley Park-Chatham Crescent-Ardmore Neighborhood Association requested the creation of an overlay district to protect properties from unnecessary demolition, and to provide for public notice and public comment only on historic buildings. Demolition will have to go to MPC for approval and there will be two conditions for approval of demolition, one to alleviate public safety or health risk, or two for exceptional practical difficulty or undue hardship.

Mayor DeLoach asked what if you just want to take something down. Ms. Harris said this would prevent that from happening if it is historical. Alderman Durrence asked if there is an inventory. Ms. Harris said there is for Ardsley Park and Chatham Crescent that was completed for their National Register nomination and one is currently in process for Ardmore as part of its National Register nomination. Alderman Bell asked if this would be similar to the National Historic Landmark District. Ms. Harris said yes, it's the case in the Landmark District, Mid-City and Cuyler-Brownsville. Alderman Durrence, said but less restrictive? Ms. Harris said yes, this is limited to historic buildings only. Ms. Harris said the request was generated by the neighborhood association and went to the MPC in February and had overwhelming support. The process of the map amendment was modeled after the alcohol overlays.

Mayor DeLoach asked what if I decide I want to remodel my house. Ms. Harris said this would not affect that unless you were tearing your house down.

Alderman Miller talked about these neighborhoods being classic, historical neighborhoods that have become quite lucrative for developers who want to come in and take down houses and put in new houses that are often not in character with the rest of the neighborhood. The neighborhood association went through channels to protect themselves and talked to everybody; they worked with everybody and he's supportive.

Alderman Shabazz asked if structure or building meant houses also. Ms. Harris said yes. Alderman Thomas asked if we should be debating or just gathering info. City Manager Hernandez said informational only. Ms. Harris showed an image of the conservation district's boundaries, following the neighborhood association's boundaries. Alderman Foster asked if other neighborhoods could follow the same process if they want this. Ms. Harris said yes. Mayor DeLoach asked if an owner wanted to put two houses on one lot can they still do that. Ms. Harris said that is not part of this process. Alderman Foster said that may be taking part of people's rights. Alderman Miller said the only thing that is being addressed by this is tearing down historic buildings.

Ms. Harris reviewed Item 6 from the regular meeting agenda which is an update to the Victorian District Contributing Buildings Map. The original map was created in 1981 and this update will add 59 buildings to that map. All were built between 1870 and 1923, the period of significance for the district. All property owners were notified by letter. Two owners objected and after their cases were heard, their properties were removed from the update. Alderman Bell asked for a clarification of the update's boundaries. The buildings are dispersed throughout the Victorian District and are mostly lane dwellings that were overlooked when the map was created. Alderman Foster asked for a clarification of the coloring on the map. Purple buildings are contributing, blue are the new proposed contributing buildings, and yellow are non-contributing buildings.

Mr. Trawick reviewed Items 7 and 8 on the City Council regular agenda regarding River East Management's request for a text amendment and to rezone six parcels. Alderman Durrence asked for clarification of the Montgomery-MLK district. Mr. Trawick showed a map of the area, which is adjacent to the Mid-city district. Alderman Shabazz asked for a clarification of the location, which is between 31st and 32nd streets on Montgomery Street. The petitioner seeks to develop a multi-family apartment building. Mr. Trawick reviewed the petitioner's request and the zoning issues involved. MPC recommended denial of the proposed text amendments and approval of the proposed rezoning request. Alderman Foster asked if these are being addressed in the new zoning ordinances. Mr. Trawick said he believed it is being addressed in the NewZo. Alderman Durrence asked how big it can get with the removal of the maximum. Mr. Trawick said that 33,000 square feet can be built on the site. City Manager Hernandez asked the number of units that they were proposing to build. Mr. Trawick said that he does not know. Chief Infrastructure and Development Officer Heath Lloyd said the petitioner's proposal is for 143 units. Alderman Durrence clarified that all this still has to go through design and site plan review.

Mr. Trawick reviewed Item 9 on the City Council regular agenda regarding Forum Development's requested amendment to an existing zoning district, CIV in Mid-city. The proposed development site includes an existing church, school, surface parking lot, and City owned buildings. Mr. Trawick discussed the additional buildings they want to build on the site. Aldermen Johnson, Durrence, Thomas, and Mayor DeLoach discussed the proposed use of the church as an event space and the occupancy of that building being 900 people. Alderman Thomas asked if the petitioner would take a lower occupancy level. City Attorney Stillwell urged Council not to debate in the work session and to save that for the regular meeting this afternoon. Alderman Bell asked Robert McCorkle, the petitioner's attorney, if the public will see the final rendering at the 2:00 meeting. Mr. McCorkle said the everyone will see full-size boards and handouts for Council members, and that occupancy is really about 400-500 max, that 900 is a calculation based on the full building square footage and how many people that are legally allowed to be in there.

City Manager Hernandez told Council that he knows they have received emails questioning the City's role in this project. The project involves City property that hasn't closed yet. We looked at sales price as one factor, we looked at redevelopment potential of property, and most importantly we looked at overall return to

the City, and return to tax rolls, employment generated, etc., and this potential project had the greatest economic return to the City, not based just on the sales price, though we did negotiate a higher sales price. Alderman Durrence said that a lot of the comments we received are that we have a conflict of interest in judging this project since we are selling this land. City Attorney Stillwell said to ask him about that in the regular Council meeting.

3. Proposed Ardsley Park/Chatham Crescent/Ardmore Conservation District

Item discussed during the preceding presentation.

4. Federal Courthouse Annex Resolution

Alderman Durrence discussed that there is a resolution on the City Council agenda today that the General Services Administration (GSA) take in to account the Oglethorpe Plan when designing the new Federal courthouse. GSA is looking at rebuilding two buildings facing Telfair Square. Alderman Durrence introduced Scott Barnard, with Barnard Architects, who has been working with a local group to influence GSA to a more sensitive design. Scott Barnard spoke on behalf of a lot of citizens he has been meeting with over the last few months. They have been trying to convey to GSA four key issues: preservation of the Oglethorpe Plan (the President Street right-of-way was given in good faith to the Federal government in the 1980s); consolidation onto one Trust Lot (south) is a good option; GSA's proposal for a parking lot on the north Trust Lot is a concern; and visual appearance of the new buildings. Mr. Barnard reviewed a PowerPoint of GSA's current proposed design that spans the President Street right-of-way and both Trust Lots, disregarding the town plan. The Section 106 process has been invoked, and GSA has put together a committee of 24 people, but Savannah representation is the minority (6 individuals). Mr. Barnard showed images of the 1997 design which was not implemented. The local group has provided GSA with options that respect the Oglethorpe Plan (Mr. Barnard showed images of these options, including a taller building on one trust lot, leaving the second building and renting it out, or infilling the historic courthouse building facing Wright Square). He discussed GSA's parking issues. Mr. Barnard recognized members of the local team working on this, including Robin Williams. Alderman Durrence recognized Representative Carter and Senator Isackson who are also trying to add more support to this.

Alderman Miller asked if it really mattered what we say. Mr. Barnard said the City, and State representatives and senators have the ability to push from the top down. Alderman Durrence said GSA agreed to submit the project to the Historic Board of Review, he asked Mr. Barnard if that was before or after the design was presented. Mr. Barnard said that was before they presented their original plans, but that they can renege on it, though they have instituted the Section 106 process, so he thinks it is unlikely that they will back out. Alderman Bell asked if they are suggesting the City's adoption of a resolution shows that we are behind what you are doing. Mr. Barnard said to have our citizens, City, and State leadership as one unanimous voice would be good. We have tried not to be negative by offering options and suggestions that are helpful, less expensive and better for our city, and that we are working together.

Alderman Shabazz asked what option they are hoping to move forward with. Mr. Barnard said we hope to meet again in April. So far it has been a one way discussion. We have been sending options to GSA. We hope when they come back, either the three story option or the infill option will have been looked, but they are so non-transparent we don't know.

Alderman Johnson thanked Mr. Barnard for taking advantage of an opportunity in a well thought out approach, in a non-confrontational manner. Mr. Barnard acknowledged that it has been a good team effort, and that they are glad the City is joining them. Alderman Foster said the only reason the previous proposed courthouse was not built was because they were in a balanced budget mode, and Jack Kingston denied it due to lack of funding.

City Manager Hernandez asked where the decisions are being made from. Mr. Barnard said primarily out of the Atlanta office, but that they are strongly controlled out of Washington. Alderman Hall asked if our state legislative delegation can help with this effort. City Manager Hernandez said that's what he was thinking and they will talk.

5. Lunch/Real Estate, Litigation, Personnel

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

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

6. President Street Water Reclamation Plant Project

Heath Lloyd, Chief Infrastructure and Development Officer, reviewed the Biosolids Project at the Waste Water Reclamation facility off of President Street. The City used to have an incinerator that handled the biosolids, which is the waste product of the treatment process of the sewage. We used to incinerate the biosolids. Air quality regulations forced the City to shut down our incinerator. We now dry it and haul it to the landfill, a project estimated at approximately \$20 million, which Council has already approved. We are asking for an increase in the revenue ordinance, article U, to fund the project. As part of an enterprise fund, we have to recover our capital/costs and we do that through new users when they connect, through a connection fee when they connect to the sewer system, rather than recovering them through the rates. We are asking for an increase of \$250 to the connection fees to recover the costs of the biosolids project, an increase from \$2,000 to \$2,250.

[7. City Manager's Briefing / Council Meeting Agenda Items for March 29, 2018](#)

City Manager Rob Hernandez presented the City Manager's Briefing of the agenda items for the Council Meeting of March 29, 2018. The agenda can be found online and will be made a part of the permanent record.

Martin Sullivan, the Mayor's Chief of Staff, announced that a bill was filed in the State Senate that would preempt local governments' ability to regulate shopping carts, Amendment to HB917. It is now headed to the House. The City has reached out to our delegation. There was discussion about what this would mean to our shopping cart ordinance and what actions we should be taking to reach out to State leadership. City Attorney Stillwell mentioned that our ordinance does not address fines, but recouping costs.

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

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

<https://savannahgovtv.viebit.com/player.php?hash=ya2GJLmT4L9w>

Luciana M. Spracher, Acting Clerk of Council

