
December 20, 2018, City Council Workshop

Savannah City Government

SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES

COUNCIL WORK SESSION & CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING

PRESENT: Mayor Eddie DeLoach, Presiding

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

Rob Hernandez, City Manager

Bret Bell, Assistant to the City Manager

Jen Herman, Deputy City Attorney

William Shearouse, Assistant City Attorney

City Manager Hernandez welcomed everyone to the meeting and briefly reviewed the agenda.

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Real Estate, Personnel, Litigation](#)

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

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

[2. 2019 Legislative Agenda](#)

Bret Bell, Assistant to the City Manager, reviewed the draft 2019 Legislative Agenda, which includes leftover items from last year, with score cards of how we did last year. Also included in the folder are the County, Chamber, and GMA's legislative agenda. He stated Marci Rubensohn, with Connect South out of Atlanta and the City's Legislative liaison, is also present and will be providing feedback as well.

Item 1 - Short-Term Vacation Rentals (STVR): Mr. Bell stated the Short-Term Vacation Rentals (STVR) has been on the agenda for the past several years. He stated they believe strongly in the ordinance passed by Council. Ms. Rubensohn provided a brief overview of how things went in the meeting in Savannah stating it was the most informative for the legislators and they were impressed with the City's ordinance. She stated they will try to preempt State legislation as much as possible.

Item 2 – Logistics Technology Corridor Funding: Mr. Bell stated Council recently heard a presentation on the Logistics Technology Corridor Funding, which laid out a five year game plan. He stated this is a reminder of the corridor, pushed by City Council last year. The State has asked for a game plan which will be put in front of the State this year.

Item 3 - Healthy Food Financing Initiative: Mr. Bell asked Manny Dominguez, Office of Business Opportunity Director, to come forward. Mr. Dominguez stated the goal is to address one of Strategic Priorities identified in Savannah Forward. The community and Council felt it was appropriate and important to make a priority that stated they would reduce the percentage of

Savannahians currently living in food deserts. This initiative would ask the State to provide funding to establish a fund that would lend, that communities like ours could then borrow from to make loans for grocery stores, corner stores, and convenience stores that offer fresh food. Mr. Dominguez continued stating we need State level support.

Alderwoman Bell asked if this would apply to farmers markets as well. Mr. Dominguez replied yes, it would include traditional and alternative solutions as well. Additionally, they are asking for an incentive job tax credit that would give \$3,500-\$4,000 in jobs created by those kinds of businesses in this area.

Alderman Miller asked what the local efforts are. Mr. Dominguez replied staff has been working with Healthy Savannah and SBAC since the Savannah Forward Plan came out to create a loan fund that makes low interest loans to these kinds of businesses in food deserts. He stated they also hope to add incentives to that; the goal is to make it as inexpensive and attractive as possible.

Alderman Foster asked how a food desert is defined. Mr. Dominguez replied the USDA has a formula and map they put out, which looks at the distance to grocery store/food retailer and the level of income.

Alderwoman Shabazz asked if the City has done a survey to pinpoint where food deserts are in the community. Mr. Dominguez replied yes, the City has the USDA map, but Healthy Savannah has done a more granular look at it and continuously looks at the block level to make sure we aren't missing any communities.

Mayor DeLoach asked if the City has developed a model that shows the overall real cost long term to see how your incentives offset the cost of the business. Mr. Dominguez replied staff is still exploring whether the incentives are feasible. It would be modeled after the enterprise zone incentive, which offers property tax abatements and a variety of fee waivers in order to incentivize development in those corridors which lowers the development costs and the five to ten year cost of maintaining the property. He continued stating not every neighborhood can support a traditional grocery store, but it can incentivize other options.

Item 4 - Georgia Works Credit: Mr. Dominguez stated this is similar to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). They are asking for what over 30 states have already done, which is develop a State level EITC. That would bring an additional \$10 million to working families in our area. Not only is it incentivizing work but it also puts money in the pockets of low income working families that are likely to spend the money locally. He continued stating they will be asking the State to create a similar model to the federal credit. Mayor DeLoach stated that is an item Council really needs to push.

Item 5 - Benton and Highlands Boulevard: Mr. Bell stated the County is planning a Benton Boulevard extension which will run into Port Wentworth and connect with Highway 30 which runs through Effingham County. Simultaneously there is a State funded parkway called the Effingham Parkway which will join with the new County extension and will send a significant amount of Effingham County traffic on City roads. He stated they met with GDOT officials and are extremely receptive and have seen a lot of movement. Mr. Lloyd stated the State have not officially agreed, but the City is in conversations with them to move that forward.

Item 6 - GDOT Maintenance of Limited-Access Highways: Mr. Bell stated at the same meeting the City asked GDOT to take over maintenance of limited access highways that the City controls which include: Jimmy DeLoach Parkway; Truman Parkway; and Veterans Parkway. He stated GDOT has a policy where they will not add any new miles into their inventory so the City has been in discussions with them about trades where the City will take over State roads such as 37th Street and Abercorn Street, which are clearly local streets in exchange for them taking over the limited access highways. Mr. Bell stated the City's position is that it should maintain local roads.

Alderman Foster asked if this has ever been done. Mr. Bell replied yes.

Alderwoman Shabazz asked if this is the first time we are taking it up on the legislative agenda. Mr. Bell replied yes. He stated when transportation issues are discussed that's not necessarily lobbying the delegation rather working with the bureaucracy of the State government to make this happen.

Item 7 – Trucks on Bay Street: Mr. Bell stated this item is something Council has brought up over the years. This has been brought up locally and various experiments have been tested. He continued stating there is some agreement that the possible solution involves some other route over the Savannah River. He stated the Georgia Ports Authority is pushing for a new Talmadge Bridge.

Alderman Miller stated it looks to him as though the City is just asking the State to help us come up with a plan and asked if we have a plan? Ms. Rubensohn replied stating she and Bret thought it would be a good idea to create a local task force to include someone from the trucking industry, someone from the Ports, and some local people to include Savannah Economic Development

Authority (SEDA), and the Chamber to come up with a plan that identifies the needs and a potential solution as this is a long-term aspect.

Alderwoman Bell asked if there is then a need for this to be on the Legislative priority list?

Alderman Durrence stated then should we have 16 items on the agenda, Council will need to prioritize what's on the list.

Item 8 – Court Fee to fund CrimeStoppers and Crime Watch Programs: Mr. Bell stated he and the City Manager have been talking about funding crime watch programs. He stated if you are cited there are a series of fees and all those need to be authorized by the State Legislature. He stated if the City added another \$5 to each citation that would generate what we need for a crime watch program.

Alderwoman Bell asked who would object to that. Mr. Bell replied a lot of people would object to it. The objections from cities is that it puts a higher burden on citizens and second the add-ons get paid first. Ms. Rubensohn added that GMA has a policy specifically prohibiting any fine add-ons because when a judge assesses the fine, the fine add-ons all get paid before the fine. The actual costs don't get paid because the person is out of money. Another concern is indigent people.

Alderman Thomas asked why there isn't anything on the agenda about homelessness. Mr. Bell replied the intention is to get feedback from Council on what to include on the agenda. Alderman Thomas stated he thinks the City needs some State assistance with the issue. He stated this is an issue that people don't want to discuss in public, yet it's an issue that everyone is talking about.

Alderman Hall stated he thinks the City has a plan for it and it is coming up real soon, and it is going to have to be county wide, but there is something coming up real soon.

Alderman Thomas stated that's fine but he believes it's something that the City needs assistance from the State with, any plan we have. Mr. Bell replied he thinks they are both correct. He stated the City is a part of a broad coalition that's working on developing a homeless plan. But when we go to the State he thinks we should have a very specific ask.

Item 9 - Abandoned Shopping Cart Ordinance: Mr. Bell stated the City adopted this ordinance last year and it appears to be going very well. Kevin Milton, Director of Code Compliance, sent some stats which stated the City has received 67 shopping cart retrieval plans, only 2 businesses have not submitted a plan and a \$500 citation was issued. The City has issued 63 citations for failure to pick-up and he also stated the City is getting very good voluntary compliance. Ms. Rubensohn added at the end of last session legislation was introduced and a preemption provision on the ordinance was added to another piece of legislation and they were able to get it held last session creating a big stir.

Alderman Miller stated as he understands it that was thrown in last minute on the last day. Ms. Rubensohn stated they worked very hard to ensure it didn't get called up on the last day on the Senate floor. Mr. Bell stated it is working and there is a lot of misinformation being spread. Ms. Rubensohn stated the retail association is spreading misinformation.

Alderman Johnson went back to the Benton Boulevard item stating the County is meeting with GDOT this month, and there is movement.

Item 10 – State Funding for Convention Center Expansion: Mr. Bell stated he won't go too much into this as this is a broad coalition that will be asking for funding to double the size of the convention center and the City agrees.

Item 11 – State Funding for Transit Operations: Mr. Bell stated this is something the City has had side conversations about. The Convention Center is currently run by a State run authority. The State is beginning a broad process to explore its role in transit funding and the City wants to be a part of that conversation. He stated the City feels it has a good case for why the State should help pay for water ferry transit operations.

Alderman Johnson stated there are also Federal funds out there, and asked would the State funding be a pass through for Federal funding.

City Manager Hernandez replied Federal funding is usually made available for capital, and not operating assistance.

Mr. Bell stated he and the Mayor attended a conference in Rome recently, and Georgia hasn't really been involved in transit and we want to be part of the conversations.

Item 12 – Amend Taxpayer Bill of Rights, advertising requirements to increase transparency to the public: Mr. Bell stated when the millage rate is adopted each year, the City is required to put out very specific ads. The State legislature has language that has to be used which is supposed to make it more transparent and less confusing but it has essentially done the opposite. Ms. Rubensohn added the legislator who has always opposed efforts to amend this in the past has stepped down.

Alderman Miller stated in the meantime there are things we can do, last year we talked about running companion ads right below it. Last year we sent out a press release instead which didn't help.

Item 13 – Small Cell Legislation and Regulation of ROWs: Ms. Rubensohn stated AT&T and Verizon have introduced legislation and worked with GMA to come up with a compromise legislation to address how small cells are placed in cities' right of ways. She stated the main focus during the last session was to make sure the Historic District was protected from small cells without your approval. She stated she will work to make sure the Historic District is protected. Additionally, she stated the House Rule Development Council met throughout the state and one of the recommendations was the elimination of the franchise fee on cable and telecommunications and instead moving to a communications services tax which would be collected by the State on cable, wireless and over the top products such as Netflix. It would increase the base of the tax but eliminate the franchise fee. The proposal was for four percent which would be shared between the State, cities and counties.

Item 14 - Confiscated Weapons: Mr. Bell stated this has been on the agenda for the past couple of years, but the law does not allow us to destroy confiscated weapons.

Item 15 – Permitting Process: Ms. Rubensohn stated the Senate caucus two years ago recommended legislation that would require cities to return permitting fees if decisions were not made within a certain timeframe.

Alderman Miller stated what it does is penalize the cities if they don't move in due diligence time. Mr. Bell replied many times the issues are with the applicant, and the City doesn't want to be penalized for actions others take.

Item 16 – Funding for Behavioral Health Crisis Centers: City Manager Hernandez stated to the point made by Alderman Thomas about having something related to the homeless issue on the agenda, this item is related as a good portion of individuals experiencing homelessness have underlying mental health issues. He stated this item is to ensure the State continues to fund the Behavioral Health Crisis Centers as an alternative to incarceration. Mr. Bell added the State drastically reduced mental health funding a few years ago and reduced the number of regional centers and as a result jails across Georgia have become the major houser of individuals with mental health issues, and it is a public safety matter.

Ms. Rubensohn stated eight to ten items is the goal. Mr. Bell stated several of these are the City being supportive of GMA measures, but they are carrying them. Alderman Durrence stated some are more bureaucratic things.

Council discussed items they are supportive of and want to take a position on, versus what is on their legislative agenda.

Alderman Johnson stated he had items he wanted to put on the table and didn't know if Council wanted to cut the list down first or put everything on the table. Mr. Bell suggested putting everything on the table.

Alderman Johnson stated Council's role isn't to make it easy as these are things that affect the work they do. He suggested adding some type of property tax relief or some type of ceiling for businesses, specifically referring to Broughton Street, as values have gone up. He stated maybe some type of Stephens Day for them.

Mr. Bell stated the massive spike seen two years ago on Broughton Street was a result in the change in the way the Department of Revenue directed the Board of Assessors to... Alderman Foster added it was based on revenue. Mr. Bell stated the concept was a limited commercial Stephens Day, but the question arose what is a locally owned business.

The other items Alderman Johnson suggested adding were:

- Georgia's minimum wage
- Allow municipalities to consider other factors in the issuance of alcohol licenses such as density and distance

- Minors and the possession of long guns i.e. rifle, shot gun
- Open carry in the festival zone (a tragedy waiting to happen)
- Toy guns should look like toy guns

Mayor DeLoach asked Council to go through the list and determine how they want to number them in order as they see fit and turn them in to Bret.

Alderman Thomas stated he can go along with most of Council's recommendations but item 16 is critical to him.

Alderman Durrence stated last year there was a secondary list.

Mr. Bell stated items 10, 12, 13, 15 and 16 will be items of support.

Alderman Foster stated item 7 should come off because there is not a plan.

Alderman Durrence asked if the same was true for item 8. Mr. Bell replied that's a political decision that Council should decide on.

Aldermen Bell and Thomas expressed their desire to keep item 16 as one of the City's bigger priorities.

Alderman Miller stated he would like to talk about item 8. When court cases are tried and there are several add-ons it could make it too expensive for less fortunate families and they could potentially end up incarcerated because they can't afford the fees. City Manager Hernandez stated in the states that have an add-on, the add-on is only placed on criminal court proceedings and not traffic cases. City Manager Hernandez stated he recommends it. Alderman Foster stated there were some questions about CrimeStoppers and asked have those been resolved. City Manager Hernandez replied we think we have it resolved, but our research found that these programs are often funded by the State through grant programs funded through court add-ons through criminal cases. Alderwoman Bell stated she isn't feeling that right now. City Manager Hernandez stated the theory is that the individuals that are convicted of a crime are now helping to pay for programs to prevent crimes in certain neighborhoods. He stated it's for operation of the programs, not the reward money. Alderman Hall stated he heard a five dollar fee, and asked if Council is wedded to that number. Mr. Bell replied no.

Alderman Hall asked the City Manager to address the issue about the City's counterparts wanting to deannex the property. City Manager Hernandez stated he doesn't know a lot about the issue but he City caught word via the *Savannah Morning News* that the County is moving forward with the request to deannex 687 acres in New Hampstead. He stated his office didn't know anything about it and his position will be to oppose it. Mr. Bell added that very specific questions have been asked to the County and they have not provided responses yet. Alderman Durrence asked if this needed to be added to the list. Alderman Foster stated one of our legislator said they will only approve it if the City agrees.

Mayor DeLoach asked Council to briefly go through the list. Alderwoman Bell asked who else is supporting item 3. Mr. Bell replied Healthy Savannah. Alderwoman Bell suggested dropping item 3.

Mr. Bell suggested putting items 5 and 6 in a different category as they will be lobbying the legislature on those issues.

Agenda Legislative: 1, 2, 4, 9, 14 and 16

Alderman Johnson suggested putting guns in a different category. But he feels the minimum wage should be on the list. Alderman Foster stated he thinks the minimum wage issue is a waste because Federal law preempts State law. He stated he believes the Property Tax issue for Broughton Street is important. Alderman Thomas stated Council needs to understand any ramifications to the budget before doing anything with that. Alderman Durrence stated it's not just Broughton Street. Alderman Miller stated he understands what Alderman Johnson is suggesting it is to cap the amount of increase each year. Mayor DeLoach stated we can't do that without knowing anything about it, and feels more research needs to be done.

Alderman Thomas suggested removing the item on building permit fees, because he feels Council doesn't know enough about it.

Council held a discussion on Alcohol Licenses. Alderman Thomas suggested having more offline discussions. Council came to a consensus that more research is needed.

Mr. Bell suggested staff doing research on the Property Taxes and Alcohol Licenses items and Council can possibly add them later. Guns will be added in a separate category.

City Manager Hernandez suggested doing full ratification at the January 3, 2019 Council meeting.

3. 2018 Affordable Housing Production

[Housing Production Presentation Council Workshop 122018.pdf](#)

Presentation will be given during the regular meeting of Council at 2:00 p.m.

4. Roadbotics Road Conditions Assessment

City Manager Hernandez briefly reviewed the item stating the City contracted with a firm known as Roadbotics. He stated the first phase of the road conditions assessment began with half of the roads in the City to determine the conditions to help staff prioritize the program as part of the City's Strategic Plan.

Heath Lloyd, Chief Infrastructure and Development Officer, stated in the budget retreat there was a lot of conversation about the City finishing what we started earlier this year, which was having a full assessment of the road infrastructure. Mr. Lloyd continued stating he asked Roadbotics to come today so Council and the City Manager can get a real idea of the cutting edge technology as to how this was done. He stated this will be a full assessment of Savannah's entire road network in a six month window and the start of the creation of a paving plan. He concluded stating representatives from Roadbotics will give an overview of Roadbotics, the importance of assessing our infrastructure and having a plan, and lastly they will discuss what was found in the first half.

Mark DeSantis, CEO of Roadbotics, began stating good roads need regular inspections. He stated they have 100 customers across 17 states in the United States and three other countries. He stated they are changing their process and are now bringing artificial intelligence to road assessment. Mr. DeSantis stated the manual method is the dominant method right now, which is someone getting out taking notes, which is challenging, time consuming, expensive and requires visual inspection. This method is infrequently done. In Europe and Australia they do it more often looking for small changes. He stated when looking at the roads they are looking for the precursors of the pothole to be more efficient and fix small changes, extending useful life and avoiding expensive repairs. He stated Roadbotics uses an app and assesses roads by sending information to the cloud to analyze like a pavement engineer. The system uses the gathered images looking for about four dozen distinct patterns, such as alligator cracks, block cracks, edge cracks, raveling and rutting. All of those features forms patterns that are visible to a pavement engineer. He stated Roadbotics took that wisdom and put it in software to look at the image data and rate the road. Mr. DeSantis stated this was done in Savannah and the roads are pretty good compared to some of their other customers. He stated it's a straightforward three step process. The output of data is a colored map with a scoring of 1 through 5, based on a national assessment. Data can be used for a variety of purposes such as improving the roads, long-term planning, etc. He continued stating when you think of the City's road network, which includes historic roads, it's about a \$3 million replacement value per mile (700 approximate miles) which is a \$2.1 billion asset. He stated the rule of thumb in civil engineering with customers is that you should spend 3-5% per year of the replacement value of that asset annually to maintain that asset. That's what you should be spending to maintain the asset up to its minimum standards, in the City's instance that's approximately \$60-100 million per year for road maintenance.

Alderman Bell asked how the roads in Europe can be maintained so frequently. Mr. DeSantis replied because they spend more money on the small fixes and inspection, so less money on big repairs.

Mr. DeSantis stated they inspect roads, and if you think of the field of view there is a camera in the windshield, there is a lot of stuff on the road that someone has to inspect beyond the road surface. He continued stating they are now working with cities looking at vegetation on power lines, assessment of signs, everything that is visible to the human eye Roadbotics can see and assess it. Mr. DeSantis concluded stating if it is inexpensive, the City will be more inclined to do it more frequently, which will catch small things before they become big things.

Mr. DeSantis stated they have assessed about 50% of the road network. Mr. Lloyd stated there is an item on the Council agenda today for Council to consider the other half of the roads.

Mr. DeSantis briefly showed Council a map of the first half of the assessment. He stated deep green is good, red means rehab/repair, and yellow is somewhere in the middle. One view showed the average score intersection to intersection. The alternative view

showed a detailed engineer's view. He stated in some cases, customers consider publishing the results so citizens can see the results. Mr. DeSantis briefly reviewed what the technology is looking for during the assessment which included: the type; size; density; and coincidence of features which provides a score. Second inspections are being done and are capturing changes since the first inspection. He concluded stating the technology provides a baseline which can be used for subsequent assessments that will be consistent year to year as the same inspector is used which provides a consistent baseline.

Alderman Foster asked Mr. DeSantis to explain how the City would utilize this. Mr. DeSantis replied one way is routine maintenance, which determines where the bad roads are and comes up with a cost estimate to then send crews out. Essentially, getting the work done and fixing the road. Mr. Lloyd added that we want to prioritize our efforts and maximize our resources, which creates a prioritized list to work from.

Alderman Durrence stated we will not set priorities until the other half is complete, correct? Mr. Lloyd replied that is correct. He then asked Mr. DeSantis if he had an idea of a timeframe if the contract is approved by Council today of when Roadbotics can get back to Savannah to do the other half of the assessment and provide him with the full scope of Savannah. Mr. Lloyd stated regardless what Council sees on this assessment, this is just the first section, and in order to move forward they really need to finish the assessment.

Alderman Miller asked if this database is searchable. Mr. DeSantis replied yes, you can search by address, it is geo referenced. Alderman Miller then asked if there will be access to it. Mr. DeSantis replied there is access to it privately, but it has not been published to the public.

Mayor DeLoach asked can we get this put together and start letting people know what we are doing now. Mr. Lloyd replied yes, in terms of staff being able to prep Council to give them an idea of what it will look like in the future. Mayor DeLoach asked when will he have it as he would like to get it published. Mr. Lloyd replied he will get with the City Manager and would estimate about 30 days, but wants to make sure the full value is understood, and ensure that it is made known this is the first half. He concluded stating to answer Alderman Miller's question, once he meets with the City Manager and if it is a desire of Council, staff will make it available to citizens so they know how decisions are being made.

[5. Waters Avenue Streetscape Phase 2](#)

[Waters Avenue Streetscape Workshop 122018.pdf](#)

Presentation will be given during the regular meeting of Council at 2:00 p.m.

[6. City Manager's Briefing / Council Meeting Agenda Items for December 20, 2018](#)

City Manager Rob Hernandez presented the City Manager's Briefing of the agenda items for the Council Meeting of December 20, 2018. The agenda can be found online and will be made a part of the permanent record.

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=1o4wydOafovl>



Luciana M. Spracher
Acting Clerk of Council