
City of Savannah 2018 State Legislative Agenda

1. **Rename the Talmadge Memorial Bridge:** Request that the General Assembly take action to change the name of the Talmadge Memorial Bridge to The Savannah Bridge.

Explanation: The Talmadge Bridge is one of the most important landmarks in the City of Savannah, and serves as a gateway into the State of Georgia by land and the Port of Savannah by sea.

Residents of Savannah and historians from across the region have made compelling cases that the bridge's namesake, former Gov. Eugene Talmadge, is not a reflection of modern Georgia, and has no strong connection with the City of Savannah. The bridge, named after Gov. Talmadge in 1953, is a significant part of the Savannah community. Renaming it after Savannah – Georgia's first city – is appropriate.

2. **Short Term Vacation Rentals:** Support home rule regulation of short term rentals as necessary for quality of life, public safety and a competitive lodging marketplace. Support the legal use of properties as short term or vacation rentals by individuals licensed to do business and pay the appropriate state and local taxes.

Explanation: Short-term vacation rentals are popular in certain areas of the state, which often creates commercial competition inside residential neighborhoods, and can create nuisance and parking issues for nearby residents. Individuals rent sofas, rooms or entire properties through online websites such as VRBO and AirBnB.

While as a whole this industry is rapidly growing, the dynamics and pressures within each community differ dramatically. Given this diversity, a one-size-fits-all approach to regulation of short-term vacation rental is destined for failure.

Legislation has been pre-filed that would prohibit local jurisdictions from regulating the short-term vacation rental industry. Recommend that the Legislature follow the recommendation of the Georgia House of Representatives Study Committee on Short-term Vacation Rental Providers, which concluded in 2015 that "regulations regarding the operation of short-term rentals be made at the local level."

3. **Aggravated Assault with a Firearm and Aggravated Battery with a Firearm by a Juvenile Causing Serious Bodily Injury:** Change State Statute to allow prosecution in Superior Court of juveniles (13-17) charged with aggravated assault and aggravated battery with a firearm causing serious bodily injury.

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Explanation: Currently O.C.G.A 15-11-560 specifies that juveniles may be prosecuted in Superior Court without the need for transfer by the Juvenile Court for the following offenses: murder, voluntary manslaughter, rape, aggravated sodomy, aggravated child molestation, aggravated sexual battery, or armed robbery with a firearm.

A juvenile who has committed aggravated battery with a firearm or aggravated assault with a firearm resulting in serious bodily injury may be prosecuted in Superior Court only upon transfer from the Juvenile Court. The maximum sentence a juvenile can receive for conviction of aggravated assault with a firearm causing serious bodily injury is 5 years; the maximum in Superior Court is 20 years.

4. Confiscated Weapons: Allow local governments to choose whether they'll sell confiscated weapons at auction or have them destroyed.

Explanation: State law passed in 2012 requires all law enforcement agencies in Georgia to auction off most of the guns they confiscate to licensed gun dealers if they cannot return them to the lawful owners.

Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police and the Counter Narcotics Team seize hundreds of guns per year. Gun-related violence is the most pressing public safety issue in Savannah today. There are far too many guns on our streets, and requiring law enforcement to reintroduce confiscated weapons into the community works against the efforts made by our law enforcement professionals.

The City requests that the law be changed to allow local jurisdictions the option of destroying confiscated weapons or selling them at auction.

5. Guns and Festival Zones: Amend open carry law to allow municipal governments to restrict carrying of weapons in designated festival zones.

Explanation: Every year the City of Savannah hosts one of the largest St. Patrick's Day festivals in the nation. This event is a massive public safety undertaking due to the large number of individuals in a confined space over multiple days. We have created a Festival Zone and adopted a Festival Ordinance to help maintain public safety. However, State law limits our ability to restrict weapons in these festival areas.

The City does not believe weapons have a place in our designated Festival Zone, which is a crowded space and where alcohol is consumed. We ask for local authority to restrict the carrying of weapons in areas such as the St. Patrick's Day Festival Zone.

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ITEMS OF SUPPORT

City Council joins the Georgia Municipal Association in advocating for the following:

Fees on Property Tax Bills: The City urges the State to continue to allow the City to list fees and assessments on a property tax bill.

Explanation: Cities may elect to impose a fee for a municipal service rather than incorporate the cost of the service into the general property tax base. Fees, instead of taxes, are often used when there is a significant difference in the amount of services required among taxpayers. A prohibition on local fiscal authorities from listing any nontax related fees or assessments, such as storm water utility fees or fire assessment fees, on a property tax bill would lower collection rates of such fees and impose significant additional costs on the City to manage billing and collection of such fees for municipal services. Legislation has been introduced in recent years to prevent fees from being included on property tax bills. Request that such legislation continue to be rejected.

Permitting Process: The City urges the State to allow cities to locally manage the building permitting process.

Explanation: The City strives to strike a fair balance between the need to efficiently process building permits to meet the needs of development and redevelopment with important public safety requirements and community considerations. To that end, development projects vary in scope and impact and the City must have the local authority to manage the timeframe and requirements of the building permitting process. The State should not impose mandates on local governments which would result in a cumbersome permitting and licensing environment at the local level by adding new layers of bureaucracy, multiple processes, schedules and payments.

Sovereign Immunity: The City requests that the State provide municipalities with the same sovereign immunity as is provided to counties and state.

Explanation: Municipalities act for the public good and respond to the public need and therefore must provide a broad range of services and perform a broad range of functions regardless of how much exposure to liability may be involved. The exposure of municipal treasuries to tort liability must be limited to protect taxpayers. To be able to continue providing services at a reasonable cost, cities require the protection offered by county sovereign immunity or the State Tort Claims Act.

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ROADWAY FUNDING REQUESTS

City staff will work with the Georgia Department of Transportation to identify appropriate funding for the following projects:

Benton Boulevard and Highlands Boulevard: Funding assistance to widen to four lanes Benton Boulevard and Highlands Boulevard at their intersection with the Jimmy DeLoach Parkway.

Explanation: The Georgia Department of Transportation and Effingham County are planning the construction of a new roadway called the Effingham Parkway, which will connect Effingham County to Highway 30 and provide an alternative to Highway 21 for commuters to get from Effingham County to the City of Savannah, I-95 and Pooler. Additionally, Chatham County plans to construct a new roadway that will extend Benton Boulevard from Highlands Boulevard to Highway 30.

These projects are expected to bring high volumes of traffic to Benton Boulevard and Highlands Boulevard, which are currently two-lane roads serving the subdivisions in the Highlands section of Savannah. The roads will need to be widened to four lanes. Estimated cost of the combined widening projects is \$10 million.

Gateway Beautification Funding: Seeking State funding to improve the appearance and add entryway signage into the major gateways into the City of Savannah, such as I-95 and I-16, Ga. 204 and U.S. 17.

Explanation: Savannah is the Hostess City of Savannah, welcoming nearly 14 million visitors a year, but the entryway signs into our community do not convey a strong sense of arrival. Efforts have been successful in recent years in securing funding from the State to improve lighting at I-95 and I-16. The City of Savannah would like to now see the State focus on improved ascetics to our major gateways.