



SAVANNAH CITY GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES

SPECIAL CALLED MEETING - PUBLIC HEARING REGARDING THE MILLAGE RATE

August 13, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, the City Council Special Called Meeting was held via Zoom video communications at 10:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, Presiding

Aldерwoman Kesha Gibson-Carter, At-Large, Post 1, Chairman

Aldерwoman Alicia Miller Blakely, At-Large, Post 2

Aldерwoman Bernetta B. Lanier, District 1

Alderman Detric Leggett, District 2

Aldерwoman Linda Wilder-Bryan, District 3

Alderman Nick Palumbo, District 4, Vice-Chairman

Aldерwoman Dr. Estella Edwards Shabazz, District 5, Mayor Pro-Tem

Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

OTHERS PRESENT:

City Manager Pat Monahan

City Attorney Bates Lovett

Clerk of Council Mark Massey

Special Meeting Agenda Items

[1. Public Hearing #2 Regarding a Millage Rate Increase](#)

Mayor Johnson provided general information pertaining to the public comment options, as well as the process being considered by the Mayor and Aldermen with respect to the setting of the millage rate.

Mayor Johnson indicated written public comment received by the Clerk of Council has been distributed to the Mayor and Aldermen in advance of the meeting (from Colin W. Brady, Andy Gastley, and Tony Piazza opposing a tax increase). Mayor Johnson then started the public hearing with the following speakers who offered public comment:

- a. Donna Baker – Opposed to impacts on Business owners
 - Concerned with assessed valuation rates
 - Hardship year for businesses
- b. Sarah Thompson – Opposed to tax increase
 - Two-minute limit was requested to be waived
 - Spoke regarding assessed values of property within the City of Savannah, taxable retail sales, and the numbers of workers
 - Concerned with school system challenges and closing businesses

- . Memories of Daniel Webster
- . Patriots, conservatives, libertarians, Christians are awake, everywhere and will continue to share grievances as well as help
- c. Donald Evans – Opposed to tax increases
 - . Seconded everything the previous speaker said
 - . Concerned that some streets get paved and others do not
 - . Does not want to see any of the police officers being sent home
- d. Steve Magulias – Opposed to tax increases
 - . Business owner and homeowner in the City of Savannah
 - . Since St. Patrick’s Day was stopped, he has been losing money
 - . Doesn’t believe the City had a plan, although personnel was going to be reduced at the time, the City Manager planned to cut the operating expenses of things like office supplies and payoff a bond using special funds
 - . City should not go into debt
 - . As constituent of the 4th District, he communicated with Alderman Palumbo

Alderman Palumbo

 - . Clarified fiscal responsibility to Mr. Magulias
 - . Important to reduce budget without cutting essential staff and services
- e. TK Burrison – Opposed to tax increase
 - . People are dealing with a lot right now, especially the elderly
 - . She advised what happens to the brain, with respect to stress and the other ancillary impacts
 - . There is a rise in suicides due to the financial strains
- f. P. Padget – Opposed to tax increase
 - . People, like his parents, are on fixed incomes and do not need any additional strains
- g. TJ Burrison – Opposed to tax increase
 - . He asked questions regarding the notice requirements surrounding the millage rate increase versus a rollback
 - . Three meetings are held to maintain the same rate
 - . He is concerned about taking both paths regarding the setting of the millage rate, instead of choosing one route
 - . If we went with a rollback from beginning, we would not have had to go both routes.
 - . He suggested that the City Council get together regarding what the citizens want pertaining to an increase in the millage rate, especially older/elderly people
 - . He asked the Mayor what the straw poll was for, when the City Manager sought a consensus.

City Attorney Lovett offered an explanation of the City Council’s decision to consider two paths at the same time with respect to advertising the millage rate hearings and the related action.

City Manager Monahan added staff met the legal requirement, and the staff also published the recent 5-years of tax levy as required by law. In addition to the legal ad, staff ran a companion ad to explain the two paths that the City Council planned to follow.

Alderman Gibson-Carter addressed Mr. TJ Burrison. She thanked him for his active engagement and what he acknowledged in his public comment correctly. The Mayor did ask for a consensus from Council. The majority of Council at that juncture indicated a rollback, since Alderman Leggett and Mayor Johnson did not participate. Alderman Gibson-Carter consulted with the City Attorney on the number of hearings required in the case of a rollback. Her concern with the two paths was with respect to the advertisement, and her interest to not be grouped with the Council pertaining to tentatively or not supporting a tax increase. Another notice went out stating that the Mayor and Aldermen were considering a property tax increase. Upon her request, City Manager Monahan gave Alderman Gibson-Carter information regarding how the announcements should be projected, and she indicated that the messaging was not consistent with what was announced. Alderman Gibson-Carter advised Mr. Burrison he is the type of citizen that our government needs to hold us accountable. She further stated, now the City is going to hide behind the CARES Act funding to cover shortfalls. Guidelines in the CARES Act say that you cannot use the money to cover shortfalls, so she requested an explanation for that as well. Alderman Gibson-Carter encouraged citizens of Savannah to stay plugged in, wake up, get engaged and hold your government accountable.

Mayor Johnson requested the City Attorney to correctly cite/provide State law. The City Attorney stated for purposes of the record, OGA 48-5-32.1(c)2 provides specific language to be used to advertise and maintain the millage rate where it is. Wording/language gets cut and paste from the Code and placed within an advertisement. He understands that a side-by-side comparison was also added to explain the precise State law language. The City Attorney agrees language in the Code is not very clear.

Mayor Johnson asked the City Attorney for his legal opinion regarding whether we followed the State law. The City Attorney replied yes.

Wilder-Bryan stated at work sessions with respect to what was called a straw poll, everybody knows that we cannot vote. So, there was no vote. We all got the opportunity to say what we wanted to happen. For the record, it was a lie. I never said I wanted to increase taxes. My platform is what it is. The Clerk of Council understands that we cannot vote, and if he had said that initially we would not have had this conversation. I have full confidence in the City Manager, and he suggested we would be at a deficit and everybody on the Council said they did not want to cut human services. We were already at a deficit of \$13 million, so to have an additional \$600,000 cut, did not feel right with her. When the City Manager is allowed to do his job, it is effective. We cannot go into the community and put these falsehoods out there when everyone knows it was not a vote. It was a work session and we are discussing it now. When it is time to vote today, the people will know where we always stood. She stands by both recommendations made by the City Manager. Initially we were at a shortfall and now he found the money. We won't have to take that route. Work sessions are about hammering out the things that we want, and it is not final until we take a vote. For the record, she would want Mr. Massey to say there is no voting in a work session. Rather we have discussions where the Council continues to work, until the time comes for a vote. The City Manager has found some money, and he is not going to do anything illegal. The citizens need to know that Linda Wilder-Bryan did not take a vote, we were waiting to get more information. Based on the information, we don't want to increase taxes. When it comes time to vote today, the people of the City will see that we are all in agreement. We held public hearings and listened to what the people said. We were able to participate, and the State legislature deems us to exercise this process.

Mayor Johnson advised we have another public hearing (#3) today at 2:00 p.m.

Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz moved to close public hearing #2 regarding the millage rate, Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan and Alderman Leggett seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the Hearing (Special Called Meeting Regarding the Millage Rate) at 11:01 a.m.

The audio recording of the Council Meeting can be found by copying and inserting the below link in your url:

<https://savannahgovtv.viebit.com/player.php?hash=6DKluUxfI9mT>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

Date Minutes Approved: _____

Initials: _____

