



SAVANNAH CITY GOVERNMENT
SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
DECEMBER 18, 2020 – 10:00 a.m.

The special called meeting of the City Council was held at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom communication, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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:

Acting City Manager Michael Brown

City Attorney Bates Lovett

Clerk of Council Mark Massey

Chief Budget Officer Melissa Carter

Chief Financial Officer David Maxwell

Mayor Johnson called the special called meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

INVOCATION

[1. Details Regarding the Invocation Presenter will be Forthcoming](#)

Mayor Johnson provided the invocation.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited in unison.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

[2. Final Public Hearing to Receive Comments on the 2021 Service Program and Budget](#)

Acting City Manager Brown provided an overview of the process for adopting the City's Budget as stated in the City's Charter.

Mayor Johnson declared the public hearing open. He asked each speaker to give their name and address for the record.

Mayor Johnson asked the Clerk of Council to allow each speaker two minutes.

Speakers via Zoom:

- Mr. John Duke - opposed to increases in the Police budget and supports increases to the community services budget.
- Ms. Rachel Shaner – concerned about the failure to adopt a reallocated budget in support of arts and community services, not Police; concerned about how defunding of the arts can occur but defunding of the Police did not occur.
- Mr. Owen Cooper – criticized spending \$66 million for Police and only \$19 million for community services.
- Ms. Claudia Edison – echoed previous concerns raised; indicated she was surprised about the increases in the Police budget; concerned about low-income housing and clean water; concerned about support to Spanish-speaking residents; and concerned about support not given to the areas outside of downtown.
- Ms. Rainé Blunk – concerned about the budget amount of the Police department, namely the additional \$2 million that was added.
- Ms. Rachel Ussery – concerned about the increases made to the Police budget and recommended investment in more proactive community programs to decrease crime before it happens.
- Ms. Leonora Moore – asked how the Police department will work with the community given the budget allocations and she recommended reallocating and redirecting budget resources.

Speakers in Chambers:

- Mr. Chuck Feagain – concerned about comments made by the Mayor and City Manager regarding no substantive impacts in 2020 regarding no tax increases, no planned layoffs, etc.; and concerned about the funding increases made to the Police budget.
- Mr. Stanley Mosley – concerned about the retirees not receiving increases, especially when they have not reached one of the age/years of retirement thresholds.

Mayor Johnson asked Acting City Manager Brown the last time retirees received increases. Mr. Brown recalls 1997 or 2000. Mayor Johnson suggested Mr. Brown meet with retirees to have dialogue on pension benefits and options. Mr. Brown asked Mr. Mosley to contact his office for a meeting.

As a member of the Pension Board, Alderman Palumbo shared the City of Savannah has one of the most aggressive and generous plans in public service for its employees. The City is committed to the old school system contributing to the pension plan.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked Mr. Brown to explain the increases for the retirees. Mr. Brown explained, for each year of service you received 2% (10 years of service = 20% of your income). That was changed to 2.1% retroactive and 2.3% going forward. The retirement age was lowered below 62.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked if there were any increases since 1997. Mr. Brown responded, untrue, when you retired at age 65, you had to wait until age 70 (5 years) to receive a 5% increase and then receive 1% increase each year thereafter. The City has medical benefits to pay for retirees until they reach the age of 65 when Medicare starts. Mr. Mosley stated, the retiree has to pay for those medical benefits from their pension deductions. He feels the retirees would like to be a part of the conversations in developing the Plan. Alderwoman Miller Blakely suggested a task force for the pension plan to reevaluate criteria.

Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked Mr. Mosley for bringing the pension plan to the attention of the Council so they can address some changes to the Plan. Alderwoman Lanier thanked Mr. Mosley for his representation of the retirees and encouraged him to continue dialogue with Mr. Brown.

Alderwoman Gibson-Carter thanked Mr. Mosley for his input and asked Mr. Brown why the retiree medical was cut across the board by more than 250% and where the cost savings were spent. Possibly those savings could be used for increases to the retirees annual income. Mr. Brown deferred to Chief Budget Officer Melissa Carter. Ms. Carter responded the amount is based on cost and the amount is absorbed into rebalancing the Budget.

Mayor Johnson declared the public hearing closed. The Mayor and Aldermen discussed matters pertaining to the Proposed 2021 Budget.

Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked Ms. Carter why the Mayor and Aldermen/Alderwomen budget increased nearly by over \$200,000.00. Mayor Johnson answered with the following: 1.) construction on the 3rd floor to establish office equipment and supplies for Aldermen/Alderwoman; 2.) Council training opportunities by GMA and NLC; and 3.) proposal for two (2) management interns for the work of the Mayor and Aldermen/Alderwomen. All three items will need to be approved by Council. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter requested a budget narrative identifying each line item. Mayor Johnson and Ms. Carter defined the reasons for the Mayor and Aldermen/Alderwomen Budget.

Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan suggested Council Members secure interns from the local colleges and universities.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked for a mileage allowance for Aldermen/Alderwomen for those requesting the allowance since the Mayor gets a car allowance. She asked for office supplies and to be included in meetings where decisions or requests are being decided. She suggested getting students as interns from the local colleges and universities and pay them a stipend rather than a salary with benefits.

Mayor Johnson stated he provided Council Members with magnetic signs for Council's use. Council Members have requested office supplies and the budget reflects the increase for those supplies. Aldermen/Alderwomen received an increase in annual income four years ago to cover the cost of mileage. He indicated there were no meetings other than those with Ms. Carter and Mr. Brown to discuss the budget.

With the consent of Council, Mr. Brown suggested paying for the expenses of Council Members. He will draft a memo to include a policy to pay for reimbursement of Council expenses and have City Attorney Lovett and Chief Budget Officer Carter make sure it is in compliance with the City Charter.

Attorney Lovett suggested a monthly stipend for each Council Member to pay for expenses and this would not interfere with their compensation.

Alderwoman Gibson-Carter suggested the Mayor and Aldermen/Alderwomen meet prior to scheduled Council Meetings to review the Mayor and Aldermen/Alderwomen Budget by line item. She recommended reducing the annual festival budget and increase funds to non-profit organizations. Mayor Johnson indicated his office is open any time for meetings and Chief Budget Officer Melissa Carter and Chief Financial Officer David Maxwell along with Acting City Manager Brown are and have been available to Council Members for discussions and meetings throughout the budget process. He stated even though festivals will not take place, the budget is needed for virtual events. Mayor Johnson and Acting City Manager Brown recommended Council move forward and approve the Budget.

Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan and Alderwoman Lanier shared positive experiences in working with volunteer students from the local colleges and universities. Both Alderwomen shared their positive and informative meetings with staff during the budget process. Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked all staff for the intense work during the budget process.

ORDINANCES - SECOND READING

[3. Second Reading and Adoption of the Proposed 2021 Revenue Ordinance \[which includes no Water, Sewer or Sanitation Utility Rate Increase; additional review expected July 1, 2021\]](#)

Alderman Palumbo moved to adopt the Proposed 2021 Revenue Ordinance with no water, sewer or sanitation utility rate increase, Alderman Purtee seconded. The motion passed, 7-2-0, with Alderwoman Gibson-Carter and Alderwoman Miller Blakely voting no.

RESOLUTIONS

[4. Adoption of the 2021 Service Program and Budget, Five-Year Capital Plan and Policy Document](#)

Alderman Palumbo moved to adopt the 2021 Service Program and Budget, Five-Year Capital Plan and Policy Document, Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz and Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan seconded. The motion passed, 7-2-0, with Alderwoman Gibson-Carter and Alderwoman Miller Blakely voting no.

Hearing no objections, Mayor Johnson adjourned the meeting at 12:18 p.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=H4yDmpv0tGvq>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

Date Minutes Approved: _____

Initials: _____