



SAVANNAH CITY GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES

COUNCIL WORK SESSION & CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING

FEBRUARY 25, 2021 – 4:00 p.m.

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, the City Council Work Session and City Manager's Briefing was held via Zoom video communications at [4:00 p.m.](#) Following the roll call, Mayor Johnson recognized [Alderman Detric Leggett](#) to offer the invocation.

PRESENT: Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, Presiding

Alderman Keshia Gibson-Carter, At-Large, Post 1, Chairman

Alderman Alicia Miller Blakely, At-Large, Post 2

Alderman Bernetta B. Lanier, District 1

Alderman Detric Leggett, District 2

Alderman Linda Wilder-Bryan, District 3

Alderman Nick Palumbo, District 4, Vice-Chairman

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

Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

OTHERS PRESENT:

Acting City Manager Michael B. Brown

Assistant City Manager Heath Lloyd

Assistant to the City Manager Joe Shearouse

Assistant to the City Manager Daphanie Williams

Finance Director David Maxwell

City Attorney Bates Lovett

Clerk of Council Mark Massey

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Water, Sewer and Refuse Services - Part II - Financing and Billing](#)

Mayor Johnson introduced Acting City Manager Brown for part two of the water, sewer and refuse financing and billing information.

The slide presentation was made by Mr. Brown and Assistant City Manager Heath Lloyd. Finance Director David Maxwell, Assistant to the City Manager Joe Shearouse, and Assistant to the City Manager Daphanie Williams were available to answer any questions. Mr. Lloyd will send copies of the slide presentation to Council Members.

Acting City Manager Brown recommends revisiting the delinquencies to see how the City can assist those residents who are delinquent, those residents who need help with water issue repairs, and institute a monthly water bill payment system.

Following the presentation, there was a discussion, along with a question and answer session by Council.

Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan asked Mr. Brown to put a plan in place to assist residents with paying the increased water/sewer bills. She had concerns with the City disconnecting residents water and residents might replace/repair a gadget only to find out this was not the problem. Mr. Brown stated the City will start a process of reviewing outstanding delinquent bills and making a determination on a case-by-case basis of how to assist the resident. The City has no plans to disconnect any residents water at this time.

Mayor Johnson stated the water is a viable utility and the City cannot operate at a loss. At some point, the City will need to collect for service. He asked when CARES Act money for utilities is received, could the City access those funds from the County to help residents with utilities (water/sewer bills). Mr. Brown will investigate the possibilities.

Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked if there are errors in the payment plan system. Mr. Brown stated the system is not flawed, residents are just not paying their bills. She asked how the payment plan would work. Mr. Brown answered, it should be based on the residents ability to pay. Persons of modest means can apply for assistance. He will advise Council of the assistance plan. Any forgiveness or delayed payment plan, should be based on ability to pay. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked if any of the CARES Act funding will be allocated to the small and minority businesses who did not receive funding during the second round. Mr. Brown stated the City is on the verge of receiving additional CARES Act funding and the small and minority businesses should be considered.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked if the \$8.7 million CARES Act funds received by Chatham County could be given to the City, since those funds should be spent by December 31, 2021. Mr. Brown will follow-up with the County for information.

Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz asked if today's presentation is preparing residents for an increase in rates. Mayor Johnson and Mr. Brown explained, the presentation was to inform the public of how the system operates and to discuss the high number of delinquent water bills. They also indicated the City must recover lost revenue in the coming years. Dr. Shabazz discussed the disparity on the Westside of Savannah. The water and sewer capital improvement projects, for years, have targeted the River Street, Bacon Park and President Street areas as evidenced by the 'Capital Intensive Operations' slide during the presentation. Mayor Johnson indicated the Westside was taken care of first. He asked Mr. Brown to discuss the major projects completed on the Westside, including the Springfield Basin project which runs through the 5th District.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely has concerns for the Wilshire Plant and Lotts Island projects. Once the water treatment facilities are discontinued, how will this affect the water system on the Southside. Mr. Brown discussed the possibility of closing the Wilshire and Hunter Base sewage plants and transporting all the sewage to the President Street plant and using the acreage to create a local park. She asked if there was a way the City could reduce high delinquent water bills by 20%, 10% or some other portion right away. Rather than have a blanket reduction of the delinquent water bills, Mr. Brown would like to have a plan in place to assist residents on their ability to pay. The City has the obligation to collect funds from those individuals who are capable of paying their bills.

Alderman Purtee discussed the Wilshire project as it relates to the Southside Legacy Project which is still in the planning stages. Lotts Island and the Wilshire project are a five - ten year plan. City Council will need to work and plan for the water and sewer capital improvement projects. Working with Hunter Base, City Council could realize improvements to Lotts Island, Wilshire plant and create a park on the Southside for the residents. Mayor Johnson expressed the City's desire to continue to cultivate a good and beneficial working relationship with Hunter Base and Fort Stewart.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked Mr. Brown what he meant by transporting sewage down Truman Parkway. Mr. Brown explained the sewage from the Wilshire plant must be moved and treated. It will be transported through the system to the main plant on President Street for treatment.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the work session at 5:44 p.m.

The audio recordings of the work sessions can be found by copying and inserting the below links in your url:

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

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

Date Minutes Approved: _____

Initials: _____