



SAVANNAH CITY GOVERNMENT

SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES

COUNCIL WORK SESSION & CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING

JUNE 10, 2021 – 10:30 a.m.

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, the City Council Work Session and City Manager's Briefing was held via Zoom video communications at 10:36 a.m. Alderman Leggett offered the invocation.

PRESENT: Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, Presiding

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

Alderwoman Alicia Miller Blakely, At-Large, Post 2

Alderwoman Bernetta B. Lanier, District 1

Alderman Detric Leggett, District 2

Alderwoman Linda Wilder-Bryan, District 3

Alderman Nick Palumbo, District 4, Vice-Chairman

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

Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

ALSO, PRESENT:

Commissioner Larry 'Gator' Rivers, 2nd District

Commissioner Bobby Lockett, 3rd District

Commissioner Tanya Milton, 5th District

Commissioner Aaron 'Adot' Whitely, 6th District

Chatham County Manager Lee Smith

Assistant Chatham County Manager Michael A. Kaigler

Assistant Chatham County Manager Linda B. Cramer

Acting City Manager Michael B. Brown

City Attorney Bates Lovett

Clerk of Council Mark Massey

Maggie Weese, Harvard Fellow

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Poverty in Chatham County and Savannah](#)

Mayor Johnson introduced Ms. Maggie Weese, a Harvard Bloomberg Foundation Fellow, who will assist the City staff in research on zoning and alcohol issues. Ms. Weese will be here from June 1 through August, 2021.

Mayor Johnson and Chatham County Chairman Ellis have met to discuss and address common issues for the City and County, especially poverty.

Acting City Manager Brown introduced and thanked Chatham County Commissioners, County staff and various Georgia Family Connection Partnership representatives for their attendance and participation in the presentation and panel discussions on poverty:

- Gaye Smith, Executive Director
- Elizabeth Turner, Research and Outreach Manager
- Rebecca Rice, Georgia KIDS COUNT Manager
- Akia Lewis, Strategic Innovation Manager & GGR Campaign Director
- Lizann Roberts, Executive Director, Coastal GA Indicators Coalition
- Earline Davis, Executive Director, Housing Authority of Savannah
- Jeff Kole, Kole Management Company

Following the presentation, there was a question and answer period:

Jeff Kole described a nine acre site, leased from the Housing Authority located behind Randy's BBQ on Wheaton Street for a purpose built community similar to Eastlake in Atlanta, GA. The site would contain an early learning center that would service 144 students from local neighborhoods with an adjacent library.

Acting City Manager Brown along with County Manager Smith sent City Council and County Commission a report on a collaborative effort between City and County, on the Eastside Center dealing with the critical issues of childhood poverty. Mayor Johnson stated, through SPLOST allocations, the City and County have committed to the project. Mr. Brown indicated the City and County are in the process of creating an Agreement which will be presented to Council for approval. Mr. Brown would also like to pursue State tax credits for companies funding child care programs.

Mayor Johnson recognized and thanked County Commissioner Lockett, Commissioner Whitely and Commissioner Rivers who joined the Zoom meeting.

Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan stated the partnerships between the City and County is a good start in making these programs work in Savannah. She asked if the City could create Daycare Center in every neighborhood; and if the public school system could offer home economics and shop programs as in prior years. Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan stated there is disparity among African American and Hispanic children in District 3 and she would welcome programs for improvement. Mayor Johnson stated the City has a partnership with Lady Bamford Early Childhood Education Center in District 1 which is a good successful working model program.

Alderwoman Lanier attended the early meetings/discussions related to development of the Center and asked what type of curriculum would be offered. She asked if the intended recipients attending the Center had representatives at the table when the initial education programs were discussed. Alderwoman Lanier has concerns with doing the same things with no different outcome. She is encouraged by the program and she hopes with it's development the local poverty statistics will decrease. She asked how is the City measuring if the investment has achieved the desired goals of reducing poverty as outlined in the Strategic Plan. Ms. Rice and Mr. Kole discussed the poverty rate in Chatham County versus the national average and the strategy to improve the percentages.

Commissioner Whitely discussed in depth the current early learning centers in the targeted area and the affects it would have when the new Center is established. He asked if the staffing will have any training partnerships with Savannah Tech and if the Steering Committee for the new Center will have a national childcare operator as part of the Committee. He recommended a Savannah-Chatham County public school system representative serve on the Steering Committee. Commissioner Whitely asked if any thought was given to having the operator of the new early learning center participate on the Steering Committee along with a Savannah-Chatham County public school administrator. Mr. Kole and Ms. Jennings discussed the concerns of Commissioner Whitely; how the Board of Directors and the three (3) separate sub-committees were chosen and how discussions with the current area childcare centers were incorporated and considered during the development process.

Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked Mayor Johnson and Commission Chairman Ellis for bringing the project to Council. She asked all parties involved in the creation of the project to continue working together to bring the Center to fulfillment. She asked what efforts have been made to assist those quality-rated childcare centers that were closed during the pandemic. Mr. Brown stated the Eastside model will be used to establish centers in City neighborhoods. Ms. Rice stated the Department of Early Care and Learning is in partnership with Georgia Family Connection Partners and have raised over \$18 million in incentives to create ways to get the quality-rated centers up and running again. Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz stated, as this model grows and becomes successful, she would like to see a focus on the greater Westside of Savannah.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked where the statistics for the presentation were collected and if she could receive a copy. Ms. Roberts answered from the Georgia Family Connection Partners census data, The Department of Early Care and Learning, Child Resource and Recovery, and school

system data. A copy of the statistics will be sent to Council Members. Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked Mr. Kole if the Eastlake project in Atlanta was near Decatur (it is DeKalb County). She stated that area in Atlanta has been gentrified. How can the City be assured that the same does not happen here in Savannah and what is the name of the company? Purpose Build Communities is the name of the organization. Mr. Kole stated the gentrification is already happening in the Eastside community of Savannah.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked Ms. Davis if the tax credit apartments go to market rates after so many years. Ms. Davis answered, that is not the low-income tax credit program. That program is available directly to developers from HUD and developers can opt out of the program after a specified number of years, then the apartments will rent at market rates.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked Mr. Kole about East Savannah United and if a person lives in that area, how can they get involved. Mr. Kole answered, they are currently recruiting neighborhood representatives; hopefully in the Fall, there will be community meetings to inform the residents of the projects coming to the neighborhood and to solicit resident feedback. Step Up Savannah will be used to recruit recent graduates of the leadership programs.

Alderwoman Gibson-Carter listed numerous organizations from the late 80's, early 90's with programs and the City is just now studying poverty. She would like to see the City move to action and not just talk about addressing poverty. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked who will benefit financially from the project. Mr. Brown answered, none of the Zoom screen participates would personally benefit financially. Mr. Kole stated the Steering Committee is all volunteers. Moving forward they will hire an Executive Director and possibly two staff members for the nonprofit organization which will be established over the next couple of years. There is a conflict of interest clause that no Board Members or Committee Members can receive contracts or positions. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked in reference to brick and mortar, will any participants receive financial benefits. Mr. Kole answered, not to his knowledge. She asked if Superintendent of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools Dr. Ann LeVett was invited to today's meeting. Mr. Brown indicated Dr. LeVett was not invited but after today's meeting, he feels the scope should be broadened to include school systems. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter suggested the following parameters:

- include local nonprofit organizations like the Greenbrier Children's Center and Lady Bamford Center;
- in seeking partnerships, the City should recognize and omit those agencies with prior preexisting issues;
- be mindful of the tax credits which can be withdrawn after a twenty year period;
- the attendees of the learning center should be taught their history and cultural, with no restrictions;
- participates in the establishments should look like the attendees;
- there should be a timetable consistent with the City's contribution amount;
- a description of the expectation of the City's responsibilities as a partner; and
- if the tangible outcomes are education, healthcare and wellness, have a detailed written program.

Alderwoman Gibson-Carter thanked the participates for the information. She is hopeful that some portion of the first allocation of \$57 million from the American Relief Fund will be distributed to the City's existing child care providers.

Mayor Johnson thanked all in attendance and stated the steps taken today are monumental. The City recognizes it will need a hands-on approach to alleviate poverty. Chatham County and the City are working together to create a more livable space for residents.

Acting City Manager Brown thanked everyone who participated today and all participates who will continue to work on the project. He will present to Council a proposal describing how families not in the IRS system can enroll to ensure they receive benefits.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the work session at 1:05 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=HXH2m0jhwlgX>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

Date Minutes Approved: _____

Initials: _____

