



**JUNE 9, 2022, 12:00 p.m. - WORKSHOP and CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING**

**CITY GOVERNMENT**

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS**

**OF THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN**

**SAVANNAH, GEORGIA**

The work session and City Manager's briefing was held at 12:03 p.m. Mayor Johnson recognized Alderman Purtee to offer a prayer.

**PRESENT:** Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, Presiding

Alderswoman Kesha Gibson-Carter, At-Large, Post 1

Alderswoman Alicia Miller Blakely, At-Large, Post 2

Alderswoman Bernetta B. Lanier, District 1

Alderman Detric Leggett, District 2

Alderswoman Linda Wilder-Bryan, District 3

Alderman Nick Palumbo, District 4, Vice-Chairman

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

Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

**ALSO, PRESENT:**

City Manager Joseph A. Melder

Chief of Staff, Daphanie Williams

City Attorney Bates Lovett

Clerk of Council Mark Massey

Deputy Clerk of Council Margaret Fox

**Workshop Agenda Items**

[1. Summer Crime and Violence Reduction Initiatives.](#)

[Youth Violence Reduction Strategy - Council Presentation - FINAL.pdf](#)

Mayor Johnson opened the meeting by giving a brief outline of the United States Conference of Mayors he recently attended. The mayors across the nation are facing the issue of gun violence and discussions occurred to try and resolve the rising incidents. Today's workshop is dedicated to looking at and committing all available efforts to address the entire scope of curtailing violence in Savannah.

City Manager Melder was introduced by Mayor Johnson. He gave a brief synopsis of the presentation, discussed local violence issues, the police department vacancy rate, along with

strategies and changes to improve coverage to reduce violence. The PowerPoint presentation was presented by City Manager Melder, Chief Community Services Director Taffanye Young, Office of Neighborhood and Safety Engagement (ONSE) Director John Bush, and Chief of Police Roy Minter.

Chief Young started the presentation by giving an updated progress report from a January model. Director John Bush discussed youth safety, programs, and violence reduction plan as structured by the ONSE office. Chief Minter shared the initiatives to reduce violence in the city, and Police Chaplain Bishop Ferrell modeled the new uniform designed for the 'Clergy Response Team' that assists the police department during emergency situations/incidents.

Following the presentation Mayor and Council asked questions and discussed the following matters concerning the information provided in the presentation:

- Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked Mr. Bush what are the 24 partnering agencies he referenced in the presentation, what are the programs in the community centers, how does information get to the public, and what prior programs will be repeated. City Manager Melder discussed and described the many programs, including summer, offered by the city for youth. Chief Young detailed the arts camp, business program, movies in the park, and the entrepreneurship program for the over 400 registered youth for the summer camps.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely expressed concerns with the Southside lacking resources. She asked if the traumatized youth in Yamacraw Village received any assistance after the fatality of one of the youth, and she asked how many employees work in the ONSE office. City Manager Melder indicated the ONSE office does work in Yamacraw Village with the youth and they currently have three staff members.

- Alderman Palumbo asked City Manager Melder and City Attorney Lovett if the city can do anything to prevent/intervene in firearms being stolen from unlocked/locked cars. Attorney Lovett indicated Council could pass an ordinance to penalize those who do not lock their cars.
- Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked City Manager Melder his response to personnel issues within the police department. She discussed the various personnel issues facing the police department and possible strategies to combat decreased staff and staff morale. Police are in harms way when dealing with homeless individuals. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter stressed the need to work with city partners to think outside the box to alleviate some violence. The behavioral health unit has only three staff members, this is not sufficient to handle the incidents that mainly happen at night.
- City Manager Melder reported the success of the behavioral mental health unit due to grant dollars that expired at the end of 2021. However the city is funding the program in the budget. There is currently a commitment for a city-led effort on police improvements.
- Mayor Johnson stated there has been a complete community response to violence reduction in the city, that is out of the box. The behavioral health unit is on call 24/7 with crisis negotiators. He thanked the City Manager and the police department for their unwavering attention to reducing the violence in Savannah.
- Alderman Purtee recommended the behavioral health program receive more funding. Incidents don't just happen at night, they can happen any time of day. He agreed with Alderman Palumbo to hold citizens more accountable for leaving weapons in their cars, especially unlocked.
- Alderwoman Lanier asked how staff will measure the effectiveness of the reduction of violence. The reports show we are up 12% on violent crimes. The 14 to 24 years olds are the group to target for assistance. There is a correlation between poverty and crime; there needs to be more attention to closing the wealth gap. She recommends trending toward economic strength and poverty reduction.
- Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan stated she goes to hospitals and interacts with victims of violent acts of crime. At this level, victims are willing to talk about assistance. The County always falls short. She recommended partnering with other municipalities in the County to assist the ONSE office.
- Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz stated, 'parents matter'.

Mayor Johnson announced, during the past 60 days, city staff has marketed summer fun programs on [savannahga.gov/summerfun](http://savannahga.gov/summerfun), as well as emerge scholarships for citizens seeking assistance with childcare and food on [www.savannahga.gov/emergescholarships](http://www.savannahga.gov/emergescholarships).

Mayor Johnson indicated the meeting had a hard stop, but Council can recommend a workshop to continue any further discussions/questions on violence reduction or to move forward on an ordinance.

Mayor Johnson announced Council will reconvene at 2:15 p.m.

The PowerPoint presentation is available and on file in the Clerk of Council's office.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the Workshop at 1:52 p.m.

A video recording of the workshop can be found by copying and inserting the link below in your url:

<https://savannahgovtv.viebit.com/player.php?hash=AOosdCnE4iGH>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

**Date Minutes Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

