



## SAVANNAH CITY GOVERNMENT SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES

### COUNCIL WORK SESSION & CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING

**MARCH 11, 2021 – 12:00 p.m.**

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, the City Council Work Session and City Manager's Briefing was held via Zoom video communications at 12:00 p.m. Following the roll call, Mayor Johnson recognized Alderman Bernetta Lanier to offer the invocation.

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

Alderman Kesha 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

City Attorney Bates Lovett

Clerk of Council Mark Massey

Chief Community Services Officer Taffanye Young

Human Services Director Kerri Reid

**Workshop Agenda Items**

[1. Introduction to Poverty Discussion - Part I](#)

[Exhibit 1: Presentation - Introduction to Poverty.pdf](#)

[Exhibit 2: Memo to City Council - Introduction to Poverty.pdf](#)

Acting City Manager Brown started the presentation by discussing what Council can expect from Part I and Part II of the poverty discussions. Mr. Brown presented the first portion of the PowerPoint presentation and Chief Community Services Officer Taffanye Young and Human Services Director Kerri Reid completed the presentation.

Following the slide presentation, Mayor and Council had discussion and asked questions:

Mayor Johnson announced the City of Savannah will be included in this round of stimulus distribution. The City is working toward raising the minimum wage to \$15.00 and is talking with surrounding municipalities to reduce poverty.

Alderman Miller Blakely asked what is the City doing about the programs in the Community Centers and when will the Centers reopen. Mr. Brown answered, due to COVID-19 the Centers will

reopen when health issues improve. He stated there are facilities throughout the City providing services and those facilities will be available to all citizens. He will prepare a report and send to Council. She asked if the City has any grant writers seeking funds from the Federal Government and the large foundations, dedicated to youth programs at the Community Centers. Mr. Brown answered, the City has grant writers seeking grant awards. Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked the definition of City 54 used in the presentation. Ms. Reid answered, that is the name of the grant which provides for short-term rental and utility assistance for individuals with mental disorders and chronic substance abuse issues.

Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan stated some of the City's policies are the number one barriers to putting Savannah First. The tools discussed in the presentation are just not enough to decrease poverty. The City's poverty rate will remain the same until the City starts using our residents as contractors and workers. The City should stop talking and commit to action by changing policies.

Alderman Palumbo commented, it will take the City, nonprofit and community organizations, and neighborhood associations all working together to eradicate poverty. The City will need to build facilities that offer better poverty reduction services. He suggested a resident hot line for poverty.

Alderwoman Gibson-Carter expressed her disappointment with the City's prior assistance and lack of service to residents experiencing poverty. She suggested the current administration display a political will to eradicate poverty to the residents. Staff will need consistent and constant leadership from a permanent City Manager to change or enforce policies.

Alderwoman Lanier questioned the data in the presentation concerning poverty rate. She stated Greater West Savannah's poverty rate is 30% not 25%. The City is working with the same agencies and taking the same strategic approach as prior administrations. If the current administration does not change their approach and strategy by focusing on teaching citizens how to build wealth rather than focusing on poverty, the percentage rates will not change. She suggested using the Community Benefit Agreement approach which has been effective in other communities. Since the City is giving funding to local agencies to decrease poverty, Alderwoman Lanier asked if the City had any data showing a change and when can Council expect some return on investment. Mr. Brown stated the approach is not the same because large Federal funding is coming directly to families and the approach is to make sure barriers for the families are eliminated. Council should expect a return on investment when they start working together.

Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz investigated the definition of poverty and reported, 'poverty is the state of being extremely poor'. She stated the extreme poor in the City of Savannah are black or African American people and single women with children. She defined the Aldermen/Alderwomen's job as two fold:

1. balance the Annual Budget; and
2. make policies for the better good of all City residents.

Council should focus on those two issues. Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz stated during her tenure, the City staff has been A-1.

Mayor Johnson expressed appreciation for staff, as he did during Employee Appreciation Day. He expressed gratitude for all the hard work employees contribute to make the City continuously run smoothly and the Council will continue to support staff's efforts.

Acting City Manager Brown stated he will work on Council's suggestions and criticisms and work on policies for the community centers.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked when was Employee Appreciation Day and did the City do anything for the employees. Mayor Johnson stated National Employee Appreciation Day was last Friday and a 'Thank You' email was sent to employees.

Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan expressed condolences to the family of Sarahlyn U. (Hargrove) Phillips, a community activist empowering women.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the work session at 1:40 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=aZyzfmHIN4ih>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

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

Initials: \_\_\_\_\_