

# **Savannah Shines Proposal:** **Investing in Our Neighborhoods**

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**

May 11, 2017

# PROJECT TEAM

- ▶ Taffanye Young – C&ED Bureau, Project Team Chair
- ▶ Martin Fretty – Housing Dept.
- ▶ Brian Brainerd – Housing Dept.
- ▶ Elizabeth Shulman – C&ED Bureau
- ▶ Star Cpl. Tracy Walden – SCMPD
- ▶ Asst. Chief Juliette Tolbert – SCMPD
- ▶ Denise Cooper – City Legal Office

- ▶ Gene Prevatt – Sanitation Bureau
- ▶ Kimberly Corbin – Property Maintenance Dept.
- ▶ Margaret Williams – Customer Services Office
- ▶ Liz Taschereau – City Manager's Office
- ▶ Cindy Landolt – Revenue Dept.
- ▶ DeLamar Turner – Revenue Dept.
- ▶ Kelly McDaniel – SFES Bureau

*Special thanks for legal research and guidance from attorneys William Shearouse and Stuart Halpern and assistance from John Sawyer, Public Works Bureau*

# OUR TASK

To develop a comprehensive short and long-range strategy to address chronic housing and property maintenance violations and improve the condition of Savannah's neighborhoods.

# HOUSING & PROPERTY ISSUES

- ▶ An estimated **15,000** dwellings in Savannah have between 1 and 4 severe housing problems.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ A projected **23,586** (45%) Savannah households are housing cost burdened, paying over 30% of income on housing.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ There were **7,318** complaints of blighted properties in 2016.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ There were **2,119** residential vacant properties, including 1,001 vacant lots and 1,118 vacant houses.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> 2010-2015 American Community Survey data

<sup>2</sup> City Property Maintenance data (2016)

# HOUSING & PROPERTY ISSUES

- ▶ The Housing Authority of Savannah has 1,249 public housing units and 350 Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) units in 2017. There are **5,631** households on the public housing waiting list.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ The Housing Authority of Savannah has 3,186 Section 8 Housing Vouchers. There are **9,665** households on the “Housing Choice Voucher” waiting list.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ In 2016, a total of **630** households participated in home buyer education classes offered by Consumer Credit Counseling, the Economic Opportunity Authority and the Neighborhood Improvement Association.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ The City’s Housing Department has approximately **354** applications for home improvement assistance currently under review.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Housing Authority of Savannah (2/2017);

<sup>2</sup> City Housing Dept. & partner agency data

# STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Part I: Short Range Recommendations – “Savannah Shines”

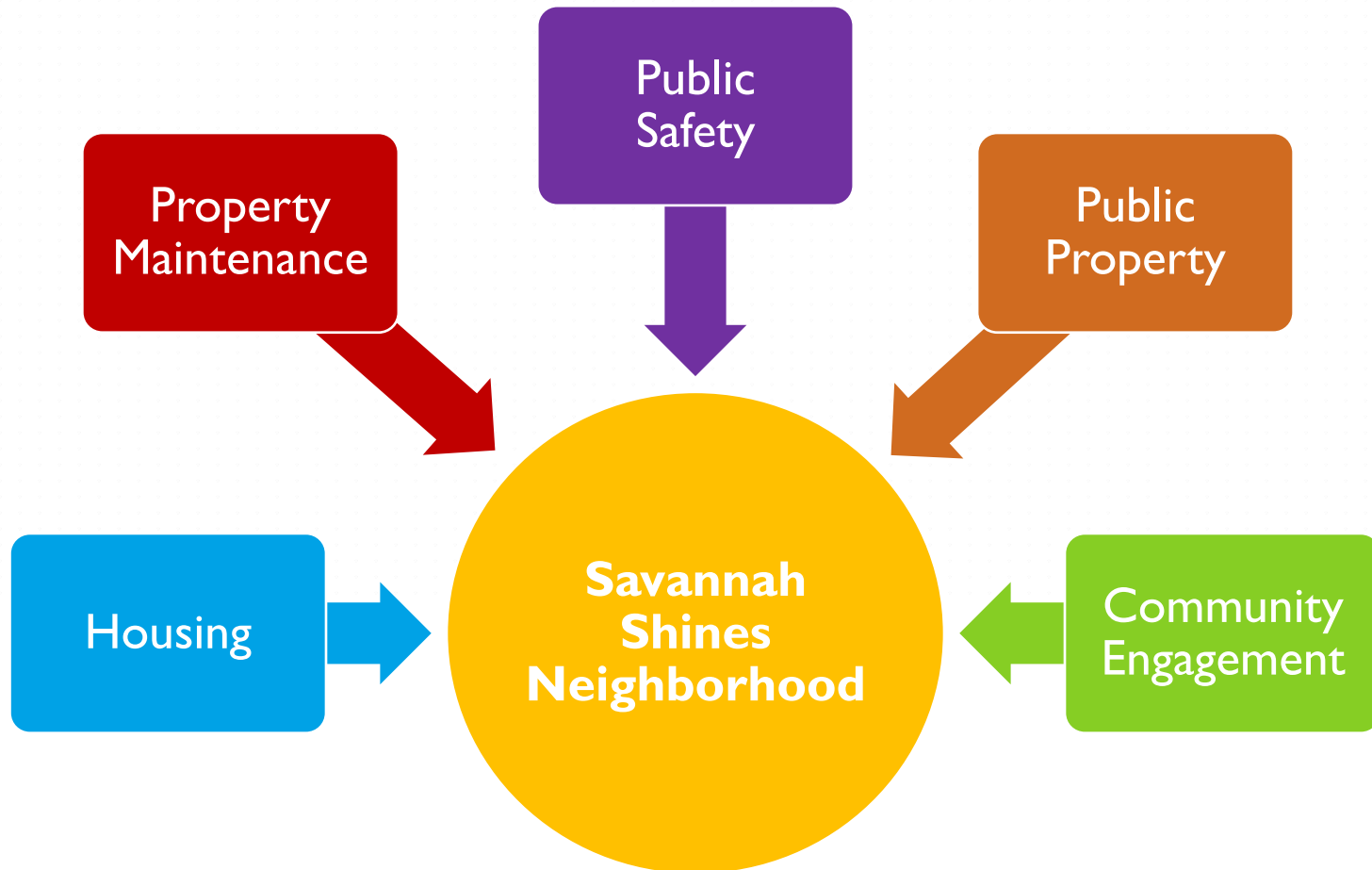
- Targets improvements in one “Savannah Shines” neighborhood (Pilot)
- Requires a strong partnership with the neighborhood association
- Includes formation of a Citywide Project Team, with Community Outreach Coordinators as the single point of contact for residents
- Will require additional resources!!
- *IMPORTANT NOTE: Regular City services will continue throughout the city.*

## Part II: Long Range Recommendations – Citywide Barriers

- Presents changes needed in local ordinances, policies and practices to more aggressively address chronic housing and property code violations citywide
- Presents strategies to increase long-term financing support for housing, property acquisition and public improvements

# SHORT RANGE RECOMMENDATIONS

Targeted neighborhood improvement in a  
**“Savannah Shines”** Neighborhood



# HOUSING

1. Promote home ownership opportunities throughout the neighborhood and in conjunction with partner home buyer education classes.
2. Develop marketing materials and work with neighborhood leaders and volunteers to raise awareness about current housing programs/opportunities.
3. Where possible, prioritize applications for housing assistance from:
  - a. Homeowners seeking to address documented property maintenance and housing code violations;
  - b. Homeowners seeking to improve the building's exterior and protect it from the elements;
  - c. First time homebuyers in need of down payment, closing cost and gap financing.
4. Promote and explore local interest in volunteering to work with the City and eligible homeowners to improve property in the neighborhood.



# HOUSING

5. Promote the Federal Home Loan Bank home improvement program for veterans and surviving spouses of veterans in the neighborhood.
6. Promote financing opportunities for non-profit and for-profit developers interested in acquiring and renovating vacant houses and/or developing infill houses for sale to first time home buyers.
7. Work with City departments and legal staff to identify and aggressively address, where possible, properties with cloudy titles, delinquent real property taxes, and unpaid property maintenance special assessments.
8. Seek to partner with local attorneys, bar associations, and non-profit legal services to provide property owners with assistance in preparing wills/ legal documents regarding property inheritance.

# PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

1. Conduct neighborhood-wide survey to identify code violations, vacant lots/structures and establish baseline conditions. Perform quarterly updates to track neighborhood improvement progress.
2. Develop a “Citizens Resource Guide” and work with volunteers to distribute information about cleanliness, code requirements, sanitation services, trash and bulk item collection schedules and fees.
3. Teach interested volunteers about sanitation, property and zoning standards and work with the team to identify and address trouble spots.
4. Host a “Community Academy” to teach homeowners and renters how to maintain and beautify their property. Seek sponsors to offer prizes & other incentives to residents who complete the series.
5. Conduct regular neighborhood walk-throughs with residents and key City departments to identify, prioritize and address problem areas.

# PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

6. Work with the neighborhood to recognize good stewards, such as Yard of the Month, Block of the Month and Good Business Neighbor.
7. Partner with SCMPD to offer training classes for renters and landlords, especially targeting “mom & pop” rental owners to learn about developing leases, landlord and renter responsibilities, addressing issues, etc.
8. Partner with SCMPD to develop a rating system and "Responsible Landlords Seal of Approval" with associated criteria to receive a seal. Invite local landlord association to partner.
9. Identify vacant buildings that are appropriate for potential demolition and pursue through appropriate procedure.
10. Work with City departments and legal staff to identify and where possible aggressively address properties with cloudy titles, delinquent real property taxes and unpaid property maintenance special assessments.

# PUBLIC SAFETY

1. Raise awareness about public safety issues and the risk of danger; and educate the public about "target hardening" and other strategies to protect themselves, their family, and their property.
2. Employ public outreach bike and foot patrols to build relationships in the neighborhood, open communication lines, and get information.
3. Improve resident awareness and interaction with the Crime Notification System.
4. Increase police attendance at neighborhood events.
5. Problem Solving Through Collaborative Effort - Organize a citizens committee to identify issues and work in conjunction with this group, City departments and other partners to collectively address priorities.
6. Work with neighborhood residents and property owners to install or display property house numbers in a highly visible area of the property.
7. Target outreach programs involving SCMPD Juvenile Officers in designated neighborhood.

# PUBLIC SAFETY

8. Partner with PMD to offer renter and landlord training classes, especially targeting “mom & pop” rental owners to learn about developing leases, landlord and renter responsibilities, dealing with difficult tenants, etc.
9. Establish hotspots for baseline patrol presence. Provide random, intermittent stops in these areas.
10. Identify prolific offenders in target neighborhood.
11. Provide focused probation/parole client monitoring.
12. Employ overt enforcement at target locations.
13. Engage the Fire Marshal’s office to conduct fire and life safety code enforcement activities.
14. Conduct home safety checks & promote the smoke alarm installation program in neighborhood.
15. Conduct Arson Awareness & Prevention Program to educate residents about what they can do to help prevent arson in the neighborhood.

# PUBLIC PROPERTY

1. Develop a cost estimate to repair, replace, and/or upgrade the public infrastructure and quality of amenities.
2. Coordinate with appropriate City departments for implementation of funded improvements.



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1. Host community stakeholder sessions with area businesses, schools, churches and community groups to solicit their commitment to help improve the neighborhood and build stronger community relations.
2. Offer targeted, neighborhood-level training to meet the needs of neighborhood leaders and residents.
3. Work with neighborhood stakeholders to build a framework for ongoing collaboration after the City transitions to a new target area.
4. Work with health, social service, and employment agencies to participate in neighborhood-based resource fairs for residents.
5. Implement a marketing campaign to promote volunteerism, recognize “neighborhood investments” both small and large, and encourage people to post their improvement efforts via social media. (#savannahshines)

# HOW WILL WE MEASURE PROGRESS?



- Assess conditions
- Prioritize issues & opportunities: What's most important?
- Review available resources (personnel, funding, volunteer support) and determine which tactics to pursue
- Establish goals:
  - Housing
  - Public property
  - Code compliance
  - Public safety
  - Public education & participation
- Perform quarterly updates to track progress

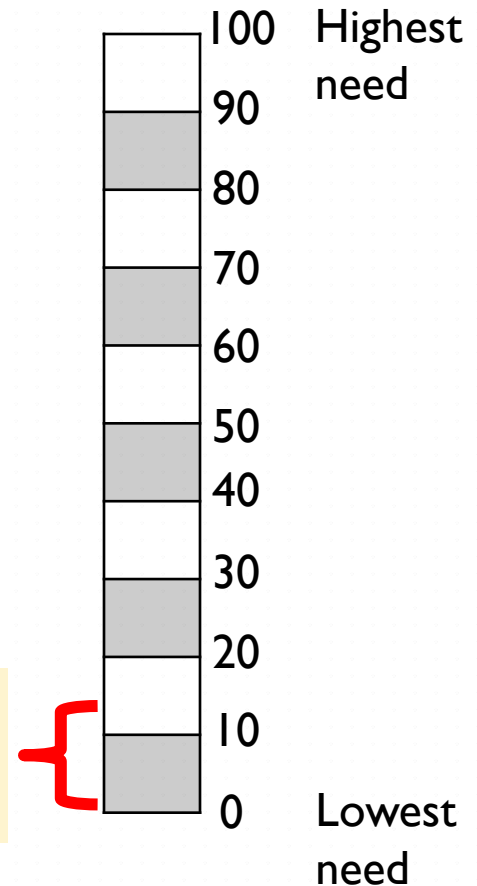


# SAVANNAH SHINES: “SUNSHINE INDEX”

## Criteria used to establish “Sunshine Index”

- Registered neighborhood associations
- Property Maintenance Code Violations
- Housing Code Violations
- Delinquent Property Taxes
- Part One Crimes
- Part Two Crimes and other violations

On a scale of 0-100%  
aggregate scores ranged  
from 1.43% to 13.29%



*NOTE: To normalize data across neighborhoods of different sizes, property data was calculated as a percentage of total parcels in the neighborhood and crime data as a percentage of total population.*

# LONG RANGE RECOMMENDATIONS

Changes and support needed to improve the City's ability to address chronic housing and property maintenance issues

Remediating  
blighted  
property  
through  
eminent  
domain

Addressing  
delinquent  
property  
taxes and  
special  
assessment  
liens

Addressing  
unsafe  
building  
violations

Expanding  
our Legal  
Toolbox

Reducing the  
enforcement  
case closure  
timeline

Building  
resources to  
support  
housing,  
property  
acquisition &  
public  
improvements

# Remedying blighted property through eminent domain

Use recently approved eminent domain legislation to acquire and sell vacant property to remedy blight and support neighborhood benefitting development.

1. Focus eminent domain in cases where a history of citations, non-compliance, special assessment liens and ongoing blight can be substantiated.
2. Provide ongoing staff support from 5 key City offices: Legal, Property Maintenance, SCMPD, Housing and Revenue.
3. Fund a 311 system upgrade to allow better tracking of property data and improve synthesis of data across bureaus to identify properties with a history of violations, criminal activity, etc. (Must be proven in court.)
4. In cases involving heirs property, staff recommends including extra points in City Request for Proposals for redevelopment of property, to give heirs an opportunity to purchase and redevelop the asset with clear title.
5. It will take significant resources and several years to acquire the critical mass of vacant, blighted properties needed to attract private investment.

# Addressing delinquent property taxes & special assessment liens



1. Aggressively pursue payment, collection and, if necessary, tax foreclosure sale of properties with a history of delinquent property taxes and/or property maintenance special assessment liens.
2. Where property owners are known, place special assessment liens against the property owner rather than the property, thereby limiting the owner's ability to secure credit and incentivizing repayment of the City and its taxpayers.
3. Explore entering into an interagency agreement that allows for collection of City and County delinquent taxes through the Judicial In Rem process.
4. Utilize the Chatham County-Savannah Land Bank Authority to acquire, bank and sell properties for neighborhood benefitting development when properties are not purchased at tax sales and are important for neighborhood revitalization.

# Addressing unsafe building violations

1. Upgrade the Property Maintenance Code enforcement standard for “securing” unsafe buildings to require:

- a. Doors and windows be secured with durable and translucent polycarbonate or plexiglass panels no less than one-fourth inch thick.
- b. Temporary use of plywood to board structures for no more than 30 days, giving property owners additional time to install the correct materials.



*Philadelphia building\**



*537 E. Congress St.*

c. Compliance with the International Property Maintenance Code, Section 304.2, Protective Treatment, requiring all exterior surfaces to be maintained in good condition, including doors, door and window frames, cornices, porches, trim, balconies, decks and fences.

2. The Property Maintenance Department is mandating use of polycarbonate material for securing structures by the City Contractor.

# Reducing code enforcement case closure timeline

1. Reduce the City practice of providing a 45 day grace period to achieve housing code compliance to 30 days, with a 30 day extension if actual work/improvements are being completed.
2. Outreach to Recorder's Court judges to request more aggressive enforcement of the code where possible, such as reducing the number of continuances where hardships are not substantiated.
3. Consider adjudication of cases through a Special Magistrate.



# Expanding our Legal Toolbox



## Recorder's Court

- ▶ Work with court administrator and judges to improve scheduling and speed of disposition of cases:
  - ▶ Allow Property Maintenance staff to schedule hearing dates- eliminating delay for court to schedule hearings.
  - ▶ Schedule more hearings than the current 3 per month.

## Dedicated Attorney

- ▶ To handle property-related cases (code violations, delinquent taxes, special assessment liens, eminent domain).
- ▶ To present court cases, keeping inspectors from acting in the role of attorneys.

## Procedural Guide

- ▶ Develop a step-by-step procedural “playbook” for handling different property maintenance cases, including voluntary conveyances by owners, clearing heirs property titles, and condemnations.

## Ordinance Revisions

- ▶ Update local ordinances to be more specific and more consistent with State law.
  - ▶ *For example, update the Nuisance Abatement Code to establish a process that makes it possible for the City to foreclose on property maintenance special assessment liens if liens are not paid in a timely manner.*

# Possible funding sources to support affordable housing development & public improvements

- ▶ Increase SAHF Investment: \$500,000 budget that grows each year.
  - ▶ **\$150,000 COS General Fund.** Continue annual COS investment.
  - ▶ **\$230,000 COS Hotel/Motel Tax.** 50% of growth in GF portion of H/MT based upon 10 year analysis. Helps support housing for modest wage tourist industry workforce. Multiplies by \$230,000 each year.
  - ▶ **\$20,000 COS Real Property Tax.** Increased revenue generated by affordable housing development. Multiplies by \$20,000 each year.
  - ▶ **\$20,000 County Real Property Tax.** Increase revenue generated by affordable housing development. Multiplies by \$20,000 each year.
  - ▶ **\$100,000 MPC Bonus Story Fee.** One option being considered by MPC for developers seeking an additional story in historic district. Annual investment goal.
  - ▶ **\$100,000 Private Investment.** Fund raising from local banks, businesses, and non-profits. Annual investment goal.



# Possible funding sources to support affordable housing development & public improvements

- ▶ Leverage SAHF Investments: \$500,000 of SAHF investments can be used to leverage between \$2,500,000 and \$5,000,000 in private investment (1:5 to 1:10 is possible.)
- ▶ Establish Local Housing CDFI: A local CDFI could attract millions of new dollars for affordable and workforce housing.
- ▶ Create a Revolving Property Acquisition Fund: Consider creating a revolving property acquisition fund initially capitalized with at least \$2,000,000 to acquire 120 blighted properties. The majority of this money will be recaptured and revolve.
- ▶ Fund 311 System Upgrade: Will benefit City departments and citizens. Projected cost based on quotes: initial cost of \$39,000-\$47,000; annual costs of \$32,000.
- ▶ SPLOST funding: Include at least \$12,000,000 in the 2022 SPLOST for public improvements in support of affordable and workforce housing.
- ▶ GO bonds: Can be used for public infrastructure, not housing in Georgia.
- ▶ Focusing existing resources: CDBG and others.

**QUESTIONS?**