

SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

To: The Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah

May 30, 2017

Pursuant to a Call by the Mayor, notice is hereby given that the Savannah City Council will hold a Special Meeting on Wednesday, May 31, 2017 in the Council Chambers of Savannah City Hall. The meeting will commence at 5:00 p.m. The purpose of the meeting will be to consider the adoption of a Resolution on censorship of Alderman Tony Thomas.

Your presence is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Dyanne C. Reese, MMC
Clerk of Council

The Special meeting of Council was held this date at 5:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall. The Invocation was given by Dyanne Reese, Clerk of Council followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT: Mayor Eddie W. DeLoach, Presiding
Mayor Pro-Tem Carol Bell
Chairman of Council, Alderman Julian Miller
Vice-Chairman of Council, Brian Foster
Aldermen Bill Durrence, Van Johnson, II, Tony Thomas
and John Hall

City Manager, Rob Hernandez
City Attorney W. Brooks Stillwell
Assistant City Attorney William Shearouse

ABSENT: Alderman Shabazz (was present but had to leave due to an emergency)

Mayor DeLoach called the meeting to order stating he wanted to address a situation which occurred over the weekend which he felt got out of hand and needed to be handled together as a Council. Mayor DeLoach read portions of the statement he made during the Press Conference he held at City Hall which went into detail of the incident which occurred with the reporter and other incidents which create a pattern he feels need to be addressed as a Council. Mayor DeLoach continued stating he asked Alderman Thomas how he would feel if someone made

those comments to someone close to him and if that type of language and behavior is such he would want to come from his elected official. Mayor DeLoach informed Council and the public of the conversations he held with Alderman Thomas.

Mayor DeLoach read the below Resolution:

RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH

Whereas the Mayor and Alderman of the City of Savannah believe each of them, and all city employees, should be held to the highest ethical standards as public servants; and

Whereas Alderman Tony Thomas has engaged in conduct unbecoming an Alderman; and

Whereas Alderman Thomas placed Council and Staff in a compromising position during the 2017 St. Patrick's Day Parade; and

Whereas Alderman Thomas used sexist and vulgar language when referring to a female reporter on May 27, 2017; and

Whereas Alderman Thomas refused to apologize to the reporter; and

Whereas pursuant to H.B. 1050 of the 2015/2016 Legislative session, the Georgia Legislature and the Governor gave this Council the authority to censure any of its members for any action for which The Council expresses its disapproval.

Now, therefore it be resolved that the Mayor and Alderman of the City of Savannah, hereby censure Alderman Tony Thomas for conduct unbecoming an Alderman and Elected Official.

Resolution to Censure Alderman Thomas. Alderman Bell made a motion to approve the resolution which was seconded by Alderman Miller.

Mayor DeLoach asked for discussion on the motion.

Alderman Thomas stated the resolution states that he refused to apologize to the reporter and he did not indicate that. He did however state he will not extend the apology to the news station, or their mission. He asked the Mayor who made him aware of the situation on Saturday. The Mayor replied he didn't recall. Alderman Thomas stated the incident occurred Saturday morning and no one was aware of it. He stated he did not say anything about it, therefore, discussions with this news station or individuals who have given him a one sided story is highly significant to this issue. He continued stating there are a lot of discussions that occur around these Chambers that don't include the entire Council or the true facts. He stated he requested information on censuring from Attorney Stillwell and has yet to receive it, so the information he has on censuring is what he found on his own. It is also not codified in the City Charter very well. He asked Attorney Stillwell what is the process and procedure of a Censure; who makes the decision of who and why they would be censured and if this is a control driven agenda they need to know.

Attorney Stillwell stated it is a State Law and it was passed in 2015/2016 by the Legislator. It states that the City Council of Savannah has the authority to censure any of its members for any action the Council expresses its disapproval. There isn't any specific definition beyond that.

Alderman Thomas stated in essence if he gets mad at someone and he gets another group to join him they can censure someone. Attorney Stillwell stated you can by unanimous vote of everyone other than the person being censured.

Alderman Thomas stated the ordinance is very vague and it makes it very political and this issue is political. House Bill 1050 was originally introduced at the County level as a measure to censure a former County Commissioner for actions some deemed inappropriate. There were secret meetings held by Mayor DeLoach and other members of the Council which did not include the full Council to get this law passed for the City of Savannah. Those meetings were held at the Capitol in Atlanta in little side meeting rooms without the full knowledge of the entire Council. He was surprised when an individual stated they walked into the meeting and did not know what was going on. That is how House Bill 1050 got passed without everyone on Council knowing about it. He continued stating this is the second time Mayor DeLoach has tried to censure him. The first time was after the election when he and others were acting inappropriately when removing former City Manager Stephanie Cutter; and now this situation. In discussing this resolution his actions on St. Patrick's Day were his own personal actions in no official capacity. He expressed his sorrows for over engaging in the festivities and those remarks are on record. He stated rests well knowing that he can't please everyone because he has been in his position for a long time. Alderman Thomas went on to say, ironically seeing that made him think, drinking with him after the parade were two members that are sitting on Council, Aldermen Julian Miller and Brian Foster. They were at the same location that the incriminating photos of him were taken and exploited in the media. Alderman Foster stated that was untrue. Alderman Thomas stated you were at the Hilton Hotel drinking. Alderman Thomas proceeded to giving a detailed timeline of the events which occurred surrounding the incident.

On Friday, May 26 at 1:30 p.m. a complainant named "John" called Chatham County Animal control to report that there were three abandon cats inside of a house located at 18 Vernonburg Road. This call was not dispatched over the radio instead it was sent to the Animal Control officer via data mobile terminal. On Friday, May 26 at 4:01 p.m. Patrol Officer, Gary Maple responds to 18 Vernonburg Road no one was home. He leaves a 24 Hour Notice on the front door requesting the homeowner to contact Animal Control within 24 hours. On Saturday, May 27 at 9:16 a.m. Animal Control Officer, Maple returns to 18 Vernonburg Road and calls to dispatch SCMPD unit to assist at the location which is a fairly common practice. Police is dispatched over radio and Savannah Metropolitan Police Officer, Jerry Crosby responds to 18 Vernonburg Road. Officer Crosby learns from the scene from a neighbor that the house belongs to Alderman Thomas. Officer Crosby then notifies Sergeant, Wesley Johnson who responds to the scene. Southside Precinct Captain Ashley Brown was notified and Captain Brown notified Alderman Thomas. He got a call from Captain Brown regarding police presence at his home. His office is located 6/10 of a mile away. He was informed SCMPD, Animal Control, and WTOC was there. He arrived at his home, made contact with the officers, entered the home, and carried each one of the cats for inspection to the Animal Control officer. The cats appeared to be in good health and all parties left. It appears from the incident report that WTOC arrived at 18 Vernonburg Road on Friday, May 26. This a day before after Animal Control placed a 24 hour notice on the door. A WTOC reporter was present as Animal Control and Police returned to 18 Veneonburg Road Saturday, May 27 at 9:16 a.m. They were also there a day before when the notice was put on the door and when the police came early the next morning. This was only

WTOC not any other news stations. It was at that time when he personally had an engagement with a WTOC reporter who was trespassing without his permission on his private property, filming his home, trashing the dumpster and the windows at his house; and God knows what else. After finishing a discussion with the police officer and animal control, the reporter walked onto his property questioning why he abandoned his animals. He told her he did not and words were exchanged back and forth. He used language that he regrets and he is not proud of. He felt that, that station and the reporter crossed the line again. They violated his personal rights on his personal private property. He continued by stating he apologizes to the young lady, but that apology does not extend to WTOC management or leadership. There is no secret that WTOC David Klueh and Silverman the manager has crossed an ethical line in journalism. He stated WTOC continues to harass him and has gone beyond what any citizen elected or non-elected should be subjected to. Klueh has attempted to build a name for himself by fabricating, coaching, and sensationalizing the news which is not always honest and nothing more than spreading rumors, lies and innuendos.

Alderman Thomas continued stating the SCMPD Officer Crosby wrote in his incident report: Animal Control Officer, Maple then stated that they informed "Mr. John" the complainant of their policy and that they had to leave notice for 24 hours before they could go into the residence to get the cats. He then stated that "Mr. John" did not like the outcome and contacted the news media. Mr. Maple then stated that he left the notice on the door at approximately 1600 hours yesterday (05/26/17) and after he left the news media arrived at the residence and made a story about the incident. He then stated that since Animal Control has been getting pressured by the media about the cats and that his supervisor informed him to go get the animals, even though it had not been 24 hours since the notice was placed on the door.

Alderman Thomas stated it was less than one day that he was gone on an overnight trip and returned early Saturday morning; and in less than one day they were going to break in his house, bust his door down, and take his personal property out of his house. Anyone would've been outraged about that. He stated he doesn't doubt that anyone would not have been outraged if they had come back to their house at 2:00 a.m. to find police tape on the front door, and their home illegally entered into and personal property stolen.

Alderman Thomas stated since his actions have been brought up he has to bring up the actions of some of the members on Council. Alderman Bell who sits to the left of him is a charming lady, but her family is involved in a scandal at Shaw University over the "Joe Bell Scholarships." He read a story in The News and Observer where a reporter called her house for a reply and she or another female hung up the phone on them. He asked Alderman Bell was she a "Joe Bell Scholarship" recipient.

He stated to Alderman Miller you were the personally hired spokesman for the imprisoned former Police Chief Willie Lovett and a good friend of his. When the department was in a meltdown why wasn't he a voice of truth then. He asked him if he knew everything going on when he was making statements for Mr. Lovett to the public about the police department and their actions.

He then asked Mayor DeLoach, you are on tape stating you will not follow the City Charter and has demonstrated that by having secret meetings and lack of true transparency. He also challenged the Mayor that he will submit to any alcohol and drug analysis that he will. He continued stating suggesting that he needs help is a smoke screen for the his own personal issues.

Alderman Thomas continued stating it is appalling and shameful that Council can find the time and need for a Special Meeting like this to carry out a control driven personal vendetta when they have the amount of blood from murders and gun shots running through the streets, talk about a matter of leadership. He stated, today the Mayor is quoted in the Savannah Morning News saying "We as leaders of this community have a responsibility to set an example that everyone should aspire to." He agreed with the Mayor 100% and asked to start today by living those words and really meaning "We" as all nine members of the Council.

Aldermen Miller stated Mr. Thomas no one here is buying what you are selling. Your actions were despicable and what you are throwing up is a smoke screen. He stated he took Alderman Thomas to the Hilton to get him out of the street because he was embarrassed to be seen out with him. Alderman Thomas wanted to buy him a drink, he grabbed the drink, walked away, without paying. He then wanted to go back to get another drink and he had to tell him no his wife was at the parade and he wanted to go. As far as the police department, he wasn't Willie Lovett's personal spokesman he was the spokesman for the entire Police department. No one knew what was going on with Willie Lovett because the FBI was conducting that investigation and they did not know who to trust in City Government. Alderman Miller stated anyone that said they did know what was going on with former Chief Lovett is lying. He continued stating the big issue here is your actions which have gone too far that the rest of the Council can't deal with it anymore. Reporters don't deserve to be talked to in that manner. It doesn't matter if it was someone's mother, sister or daughter it was a constituent of this city who was treated like that. He stated Council can't abide by that and they have gone too far and it's time for them to say I'm sorry because they can't accept that which is what this meeting is about.

Alderman Bell stated as city leaders they have an obligation to conduct themselves in a manner that is respectful of others and sheds the best possible light on their city. She hopes that all members of Council take their responsibility seriously.

Alderman Johnson stated he sees two separate issues one being what occurred at Alderman Thomas' home which is his personal business; and the other being what happened on St. Patrick's Day. He stated what Alderman Thomas did was wrong and it is inappropriate to refer to a female in that manner. He asked Attorney Stillwell where does the law fall regarding censure and if it is for any action personal or professional. Attorney Stillwell stated any actions for which the Council expresses its disapproval. Alderman Johnson stated Council will be having a Work Session on Strategic Planning but how can they discuss strategic planning when they can't pull together as a team. He asked Mayor DeLoach that the resolution be amended considering what has occurred since the resolution has been read.

Mayor DeLoach stated this is an obvious pattern of behavior that Alderman Thomas will continue and he believes saying sorry will be okay. What Alderman Johnson said is not relative to the issues they are discussing today. It is another attempt to cover up another obvious pattern from Alderman Tony Thomas. Mayor DeLoach stated he wants Alderman Thomas there to help him improve his situation, but he can't condone his actions.

Alderman Johnson stated he is insulted that the Mayor would imply that he is complicit in any type of cover up. He stated what Alderman Thomas did was wrong, but they also have a

resolution that may be factually incorrect. The Mayor stated the resolution was written before Alderman Thomas came into the meeting and apologized to the reporter. Alderman Johnson stated he apologized publicly and it needs to be addressed. They also discussed St. Patrick's Day and it has been put to rest. Mayor DeLoach stated in regards to St. Patrick's Day, he spoke with Alderman Thomas and said he would stand with him for this matter but (which is the key to this deal) if this ever happens again he would have to call him out and that is why it is in the resolution. Alderman Johnson stated he doesn't agree with the actions of Alderman Thomas but lines 3 and 5 of the resolution need to be removed. He stated the 3rd line refers to the St. Patrick's Day incident, which Council had agreed to move past; and line 5 regarding Alderman Thomas' apology to the reporter is a moot issue. Mayor DeLoach stated that he wanted to make it clear that such incidents would not be tolerated and said he was opposed to the elimination of the apology paragraph, but he will strike out line 3.

Alderman Bell made a motion to amend her previous motion to take out line 3 of the resolution regarding the 2017 St. Patrick's Day parade, it was seconded by Alderman Miller and unanimously carried. A board vote was taken with the following voting in favor: Mayor DeLoach, Aldermen Bell, Miller, Foster, Durrence, Johnson and Hall.

Resolution to Censure Alderman Thomas with line 3 taken out was approved with the following voting in favor: Mayor DeLoach, Aldermen Bell, Miller, Foster, Durrence and Hall. Alderman Johnson voted against the motion.

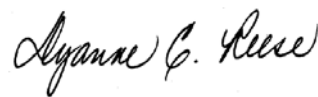
Alderman Johnson made a motion to amend the resolution to take out line 5.

Mayor DeLoach stated Alderman Thomas did not apologize until he was put in a corner and he had no other place to go and to say it in front of the cameras.

Alderman Thomas asked Mayor DeLoach who he is working with if he knew about this on Saturday who informed him. Mayor DeLoach replied it doesn't matter. Alderman Thomas stated it does because it shows you are being conspiratorial.

Alderman Johnson repeated his motion to amend the resolution to take out line 5, the motion was seconded by Mayor DeLoach with the following voting in favor: Mayor DeLoach, Aldermen Bell, Miller, Foster, Durrence, Johnson and Hall.

Mayor DeLoach declared this Special Meeting of Council adjourned.



Dyanne C. Reese, MMC
Clerk of Council

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