

SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

To: The Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah

July 21, 2017

Pursuant to a Call by the Mayor, notice is hereby given that the Savannah City Council will hold a Special Meeting on Friday, July 21, 2017 in the Council Chambers of Savannah City Hall. The meeting will commence at 10:00 a.m. The purpose of the meeting will be to address the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department Intergovernmental Agreement.

Your presence is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Dyanne C. Reese, MMC
Clerk of Council

The Special meeting of Council was held this date at 10:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited in unison followed by the Invocation which was given by Alderman Carol Bell.

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, Tony Thomas and John Hall

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

ABSENT: Alderman Shabazz (out of town but was listening via phone)
Alderman Van Johnson, II (conflict of interest due to being a County employee)

Mayor DeLoach called the meeting to order and read the following statement:

"Good Morning, this is not a meeting I or any of Council wanted to have. We had hoped we would have received a reply from the County during these 21 days. We can't run a police department without communication, especially communication required by the merger agreement.

"Myself and this Council have defined Public Safety as our top priority. We have endorsed the seven-minute response time Berkshire proposes and all the resources necessary to obtain that goal. This is not an issue to be debated or compromised. Lives and livelihood of our community depend on it.

"Berkshire recommended the addition of 150 officers to provide a seven-minute response time and detailed the costs that should be allocated to each entity. Four City employees, four County employees and five police officers met for more than 25 hours to guide this study.

"County leaders and staff were jointly involved in the selection of this consultant, the directives provided for the study and the proceedings during the study period. It was only after the results of the study contrasted with the expectations of the Commission that any objections were raised.

"We still do not know where the County stands on the length of the response time, or even if they desire to hire more officers for the department. These are not questions we can wait to have answers on. If we started hiring officers now, it would be at least a minimum of 6 months before they are on patrol. There was never a discussion to hold negotiations in December. The Berkshire report was completed in April so we could finalize the County's share prior to them adopting a budget.

"And since the County has not responded we are forced to take a vote this morning to end the police merger. It is a merger this Council has worked hard to save and improve upon. This vote is coming pursuant to Paragraph 15 of our agreement. If successful, Chatham County should proceed with securing and having in operation its own police protection for the unincorporated area by February 1, 2018."

Alderman Shabazz stated via phone that she is in agreeance with the Mayor and the Council.

Alderman Thomas stated he endorses the statement made by Mayor DeLoach to end the police merger, but before the vote is taken he has a concern with the following statement "we will welcome a discussion as long as the County endorses the seven-minute response time as a goal as well as the funding formula brought forth by the Berkshire study." He stated Council has already presented that option to the County and he feels it should not be a part of the statement because if Council votes to end the merger they should end it and not leave the option open for further discussions. He continued stating letters were sent by Mayor DeLoach to Chairman Scott and by City Manager Hernandez to County Manager Smith and he believes Council and staff have done what is needed in order to preserve the consolidated police department but it does not appear that the County wishes to do the same.

Alderman Foster stated the reason for the merger goes back a number of years when he was involved as a community leader and he supported it. The reasons for the City and County merger were all legitimate reasons and made a lot of sense. The unincorporated areas of the County are spread out and at the time it was difficult for police officers to communicate with each other. The County police and City police were confused on where to go when there were reported issues. As of today, there have been some changes but there are still some inefficiencies. The unincorporated areas may have difficulties determining if they are within City or County

lines and it is not fair to the citizens who they represent. He continued stating he believes both municipalities should continue to try to figure out how to run a consolidated police force for the citizens because it is more efficient and would be more expensive if the unincorporated area goes out on their own. From a taxpayer stand point consolidation of the police force makes sense especially for public safety. He concluded stating he feels Metro needs to stay together and is hopeful they can figure out a way to do so.

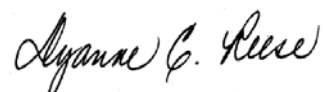
Alderman Miller stated the promise everyone on Council made during the election was that everyone was going to do something about crime and take the necessary steps to have a well-functioning police department which the City didn't have at the time. There were also a lot of problems where restrictions were put on police officers which kept them from doing their job. They knew what needed to be done but didn't have the man power or the resources to get it done. In January 2016, this Council set out to rectify those issues. It has been an uphill struggle because answers weren't being given and meetings were not being attended. He continued stating he worked very hard with members of the County Commission to come up with a solution to the demerger situation. The City has done everything it said it would. The livelihood and safety of the community is at risk. Council's responsibility is to do what is best for the City of Savannah residents, if they could do it county wide it would be marvelous, but they have to move forward. The police department is one segment of the solution. There are other things to be examined such as blight, jobs, poverty and the social programs. He concluded stating they can't afford to sit back and wait and recommended that Council moves forward.

Alderman Bell stated she agrees with the Mayor and her fellow Council members. The City has taken the lead in trying to work in a collaborative fashion with the County regarding public safety. Since the 90s there have been recurring issues with the City and County and they are now at the end of the road especially with the issues that the community has been facing and they cannot continue to operate like they are. She concluded stating she supports the decision.

Alderman Durrence stated he is disappointed and consolidation makes sense on paper. When they took office they made it a priority to address concerns that the County had, but everything they tried has not worked. He concluded stating at this point, they do not have a choice and he agrees with the Mayor to demerge the police department.

Alderman Hall stated having heard the statement read by Mayor DeLoach and comments from Council he moves to end the merger agreement between the City of Savannah and Chatham County which will go in effect on February 1, 2018, the motion was seconded by Alderman Thomas with the following voting in favor: Mayor DeLoach, Alderman Bell, Foster, Durrence, Hall, Miller, and Thomas.

Mayor DeLoach declared this Special Meeting of Council adjourned.



Dyanne C. Reese, MMC
Clerk of Council