



**STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
SUMMARY/FINAL MINUTES
February 19, 2019**

PRESENT: Mayor Eddie W. DeLoach, Presiding
Mayor Pro-Tem Carolyn H. Bell
Alderman Julian Miller, Chairman of Council
Alderman Brian Foster, Vice-Chairman of Council
Aldermen Bill Durrence, Van R. Johnson, II, John Hall,
Dr. Estella E. Shabazz

City Manager Rob Hernandez
Interim City Attorney Jen Herman

ABSENT: Alderman Tony Thomas
Assistant City Attorney William Shearouse

Mayor Pro-Tem Carol Bell welcomed everyone. The Pledge of Allegiance was lead by Alderman Brian Foster, followed by the Invocation by Reverend Da'Henri Thurmond, Sr. of Saint Paul CME Church.

A brief video was played highlighting activity for the City of Savannah 2018.

Mayor DeLoach: Members of Council, Mr. City Manager, distinguished guests, and my fellow Savannahians. As I stand before you tonight, our nation, state, and city are seeing the greatest growth we have ever witnessed. There is no doubt that I am proud to report to all of you today, the state of our city is thriving.

In 2018, our city saw record low unemployment, a significant 20% drop in our poverty rate for the first time in a generation, over \$547 million in private investment in our city, and the increase of our Bond rating to AA+. The Savannah Police Department never missed a beat during the de-merger process and is being proudly led by Chief Roy Minter. The Savannah Fire Department, led by Chief Mark Revenew, and the recently retired Chief Charles Middleton, continues to lead the nation with their ISO one classification and a four-minute response time.

That is not to say 2018 was not without her challenges. We lost 28 citizens to gun violence. We are challenged to work to maintain a healthy balance between our residents and a growing tourism and business community. We continue to deal with aging infrastructure and the effect our continued growth has on our National Landmark Historic District and the Oglethorpe Plan.

Many of these are not new challenges to Savannah and have been plaguing our city for generations. The problem the city has faced is trying to apply short term solutions to long term problems. Too often, the elected officials have been focused on the next election cycle, and not on what is best for the long-term health and growth of our city and her residents. I have and will continue to do what is right for our residents, and not what is easy and politically popular.



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Crime was one of the main reasons that propelled me to run for the office of Mayor. In 2015, Savannah was facing the largest crime wave since the Ricky Jivens Gang. Our citizens were scared to go outside their own houses after dark. This Council and I will continue to dedicate the resources to combat our serious gang, guns, and drug problem. And yes, Savannah does have a gang issue, and we have had this problem for over 20 years. For years, our city tried to hide that, but fortunately the past two police chiefs, Lumpkin and Revenew, and our current Chief are laser focused on reducing gang and gun violence in our community. Chief Minter often says he is focused on going after gangs, guns and drugs. All three are related, and I and all the Aldermen will provide whatever resources necessary to accomplish this lofty goal. In the past three years, Savannah has gone from 49 homicides to 28. While this is a significant improvement, too many families are still left hurting. And, I have to include those families with members who survived violent attacks but will be forever affected by these crimes. While we will continue to bring this number down even further, our investigators and our cold case unit will not rest until each and every murderer is brought to justice.

As a city, we must make sure we provide a pathway to economic freedom and mobility for our citizens and their families. This year, in partnership with the private sector, I led the effort in hosting two job fairs which brought our residents face to face with businesses that were currently hiring. We had close to 2,000 people attend the job fairs, and it was amazing to see many of the businesses hire residents on the spot, that very day. We also provided classes for the citizens to come in and receive help with resume writing, interviewing, dressing for success, and how to remove issues from your background. We wanted and will continue to provide the resources to make sure there are very few stumbling blocks for our residents to find meaningful employment. I am proud to say the businesses in our community are proud to work with us to ensure our citizens have jobs and economic stability.

The City, in collaboration with Juvenile Court Judges, and the County opened the Front Porch Center for Youth on October 1. The Front Porch is a multi-agency resource center that provides youth and their families support services, and social services including education and behavioral health, without getting involved with the juvenile justice system. If the Savannah Police Department picks up a minor for a misdemeanor crime they can drop them off at the Front Porch, where their needs are addressed by a trained counselor instead of someone with a gun. Before the Front Porch was established, the police might have to spend hours with the minor while they located and contacted a family member. Now, once the minor is dropped off, an assessment of their situation is completed, and the minor can be reconnected with a family member. Since the opening they have served over 119 youths in our community. These are 119 minors that did not have to enter the juvenile court system. 14 of those 119 youths learned of the Front Porch before it was publicized showed up seeking for help on their own. This program allows the judges to focus their time on the more high-risk offenders.



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Sadly, for many of our residents, a youthful event has placed a permanent mark on their record, which blocks them from getting a job or having upward mobility in their desired field of work. While the Front Porch provides help to minors, we are launching a new diversion program that will build off the success of the Front Porch Center and serve the next segment of the population – those in between the ages of 17-25. This program has been in the works for several months and is a collaboration with my office, the District Attorney, the Savannah Police Department, and the Coastal Georgia Indicators Coalition. We hope to have the diversion program in place as a pilot this spring. With this program the city can and will allow offenders to opt into a diversion program voluntarily to avoid charges for minor crimes. The offenders will be asked to complete a mixture of mediation, community service, and a reasonable fine. Once all the requirements are complete, the person will be able to avoid even having a charge on their record. We must encourage our youth to reach for the stars, we should not tie a weight around their feet before they even get a chance to fly.

Even as the Savannah Police Department remains focused on gang reduction, we know studies show that as gang violence goes down, domestic violence raises its ugly head. The City of Savannah is fortunate to have organizations like Safe Shelter, Coastal Children's Advocacy Center and Rape Crisis Center to help these victims in their time of need. District Attorney Meg Heap has been working nonstop with these non-profits, as well as the City, the County, and many others to create a Family Justice Center. This team firmly believes, just like in other cities, we will see a significant drop in domestic violence with the creation of the Family Justice Center. When all the resources these victims need are in one location, they will find the safety and security they lack in their homes and will not have to return to the abuse. Chief Minter has made going after the abusers a top priority as well, and that is why this morning, I was proud to stand with him at a press conference creating the SPD's Domestic Violence Task Force.

Let me repeat this for those not paying close attention: For the first time, our Savannah Police Department is going to have a task force focusing solely on going after domestic violence. The detectives assigned to this task force will receive special training and focus directly on all family and domestic abuse, and they will work closely with the non-profits and the Assistant District Attorneys who will be prosecuting the cases. I pray with the creation of the Family Justice Center, and the new task force, we will see greater protection for those that are in abusive situations. We've seen with the success of the Front Porch, and the expected success of programs like the Family Justice Center and Diversion Program for 17-25 year olds, we can achieve great things when we work together. We must continue to break down our silos and work together to move forward.

Two years ago, I laid out an ambitious plan called Savannah Shines Campaign. Since then the city has made great progress in the Edgemere/Sackville Neighborhood. A new park is under construction, sidewalks have been built to improve connectivity and walkability, resources have been offered and pressure has been put on absentee landlords to improve their properties, and



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abandoned properties have been torn down for new affordable workforce housing. The Savannah Shines Campaign has led to safer neighborhoods and increasing property values for our residents. While there is still work to be completed, we must thank our residents for being such great partners with the city. The pride the residents take in their neighborhood is contagious. While it will soon be time to take the Savannah Shines to a new neighborhood, we will always be committed to neighborhood improvements in your neighborhood and city wide. Sadly, there are also areas of our city that are full of blight, and abandoned properties that have been neglected for decades. These blighted and abandoned houses hurt property values and provide hiding places for criminals and illegal activities. That is why I worked closely with our State Legislature and the Governor to change the eminent domain laws so that the city may return to the ambitious goals of Mayor Floyd Adams and tear down these blighted and abandoned homes to rebuild affordable workforce housing. Working with the members of the West Side Community and the business community we will rebuild and rehab areas like Cumming Street in the 1st District so the residents can take pride in an area that's been long forgotten. We have already started the process on 7 houses, with 10 more to come before Council in a few short weeks, and even more identified to begin the process by the end of the year. It is a long process, but one I am committed to seeing become successful for our residents. So tonight, I am asking my Council and the county to join me in setting aside at least \$6 million dollars of the proposed SPLOST dollars to create a revolving fund to build 50 homes a year in our Savannah neighborhoods. These funds will provide quality work force housing, that our struggling citizens so desperately need.

The residents on the East Side have waited for far too long to see phase two of the Waters Ave Redevelopment project break ground. Alderman Durrence has informed me that by the end of March this work will be underway. This is a project he has spent many hours pushing forward. Waters Ave is an important corridor for our city, and that is why we are doing these road and streetscapes enhancements to help draw more investments from the private sector to the area. We will continue to offer the current tax incentives, through the Economic Empowerment Zone, to help draw new local businesses to the area, which will provide jobs and economic opportunity for those in the neighborhood as well as the whole city.

We must continue to teach our youth the dignity of work, and that the first job you have it is not where you end up. Some of the first jobs I had were washing cars, catching chickens, and cropping tobacco. Today, I own my own business, and am the Mayor of the City of Savannah. Just like my first job, the first jobs for the Summer 500 program students will teach them how to work. It teaches them the importance of work, and the value of a dollar. It teaches personal growth. Helping these students learn these valuable lessons has been the greatest accomplishment of the Summer 500 program. If you are 16 and above and in high school in Chatham County, I urge you to apply for a job this summer. Applications are currently being accepted. You will receive a week of job training, as well as a summer job that will provide you a minimum of 32 hours a week at \$8 an hour. If you want to apply, please visit



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www.SavannahGa.gov/Summer500 , applications are being accepted until March 31st. If you are a business owner, I ask you to please take a chance and hire one of our students. Provide them with a chance to grow and learn the dignity of work. I am sure you remember who your first boss was, and how they took a chance on you, please provide these students the opportunity that will last a lifetime. Be their first boss, be their mentor, and help make a student's life that much better, and make Savannah that much better.

In this room can agree on the fact Savannah is the most beautiful city in America. The vision General Oglethorpe laid out for our city in February of 1733 is still taught in architecture classrooms across the world. This is one of the many reasons Savannahians can take much pride in the honor of the downtown area being listed as a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service. Every historic city in the world deals with the challenges of tourism and growth. These challenges also bring many positives to the mix as well – including being a place where businesses continue to relocate. At the same time, we need to preserve our past. And, while I might wonder at some of the National Park Services findings, we must work with them to make sure we protect the integrity of our historical city. Since the report has come out, the National Park Service has been a great partner working with us to devise a plan to improve our standing. The National Park Service and our residents know we did not get in this situation overnight, and as a result we must create a long-term blueprint to help strengthen and protect the Oglethorpe Plan. That is why I have put together a working group of preservationists, residents, and the business community to work with the City and the National Park Service to help secure our historic status. I will also be calling this group together to expand their focus, to begin to look for buildings outside the historic district that tell the story of Savannah and need to be preserved. The history of our city might have started downtown, but does not end in the boundaries of the historic district. We must not wait until after the fact to realize the historical significance of a particular building.

As we continue to grow our city, we must find locations to grow our business and residential communities, and not just in the downtown core. This administration worked with residents and stakeholders to create the Hotel Map Overlay to limit the size, shape and growth of hotels in residential areas. We also passed ordinances that increased density and encouraged residential development. I will be calling together members of the business community, stakeholders, and residents, to create a comprehensive master plan. We have not had a master plan for the entire city since General Oglethorpe laid out his first plans for the colony. This plan needs to include a focus on recruiting new business and other opportunities in the Abercorn Corridor from Derenne to I-95. We must create a plan now so, we can manage and grow potential opportunities. The landscape of the Southside is changing, with the growth of the Georgia Southern Campus at Armstrong, and new commercial and residential ventures we must and can work hand in hand to lay out the vision for growth and innovation in this corridor. I am asking council to set aside money to complete this study in 2020 so that we can embrace the economic engine that a strong research university can be for Savannah and the surrounding communities.



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As a small businessowner myself, I know that the Government does not create jobs, but with too many regulations and rules, it can stop the growth and momentum of attracting new industries to our area. The city has been focused on finding ways to reduce regulations, and help businesses move through the permitting process faster. We have also recently passed the HIRE Savannah Ordinance which makes hiring local business a priority. Our local businesses, and workforce are the best in the world, and if given the chance they can and will exceed all expectations.

Last year, the legislature passed a bill designating Savannah as a Technology and Logistics Corridor for the state. Working with SEDA and the Creative Coast we are fighting to make sure we receive the funding from the state to grow and expand our small business incubator. With the right investments we can create a business environment right here in Savannah that will grow technology and logistics jobs that can and will drive our economy for decades to come. These are the jobs of the future, and we must be looking at all segments of the economy to make sure Savannah has a bright economic future for generations to come.

We must continue our path forward. We must continue to push forward with new ideas, new partnerships, and new programs to help our city and her residents. This Council will not get everything right the first time, but we will always listen, and take your ideas into consideration. We will continue to push the fight forward when it comes to getting gangs, guns, and drugs off our streets. We will continue to push forward to eliminate blight and improve our neighborhoods in every corner of the city. We will continue to push forward to find alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent crimes. We will continue to push economic advancement to lift our citizens out of poverty.

I am honored to be your mayor and to work with these Alderman. Alderman Johnson is a great mentor to members of the Savannah Youth Council. Alderman Durrence has shown a remarkable dedication to detail as this council works to move ordinances that have stalled for years. His work with the staff and stakeholder groups helped lead the passage of the alcohol, and short term vacation rental ordinance updates, as well as the Hotel Map Overlay. Alderman John Hall works harder than most when it comes to his constituents. He will fight night and day, and he delivers, with a new police precinct, new sidewalks, a new playground, and strict code enforcement for neighborhood improvement. Alderman Miller is someone I can always seek guidance and advice from, and his commitment to public safety is second to none. He has worked diligently to bring the youth of Savannah more recreational opportunities, including a new basketball program. Alderman Shabazz knows the ins and outs of the fifth district like no one I have ever seen. Her work to make sure local businesses receive preference with the HIRE Savannah and the Disadvantaged Business Ordinance has been exceptional. When it comes to the South Side, Alderman Thomas and I have attended more ribbon cuttings for more trails, and parks – including a dog park – than any other district in this city. Alderman Foster has been working diligently to strengthen the financial position of the city. His understanding of finance and banking has led to him advising council on budget issues, including helping the city receive an increase to our bond



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rating to AA+. And, Mayor Pro Tempore Carol Bell has not slowed down one minute this term. She has been a leader on collaboration with the County, Judicial System, and the School Board. Her commitment to the Summer 500 Program, the Front Porch, as well with the new diversion program is unmatched. She is a great role model for our youth, and a strong leader for Savannah. I am honored to work with the City Manager, City Clerk, City Attorney and city staff to turn these goals and policies into reality. I do want to take a minute and recognize the employees of the City of Savannah. Since I have been Mayor we have weathered two hurricanes, a snow storm, and countless other events and even still they wake up every day ready to work to make our city a better place, and 99% of the time they do it with a smile. Thank you on behalf of this Council, the residents, and all the visitors, for all you do.

Many of the things we have accomplished in the last three years have been discussed for decades, and I am proud to say we are getting it done. We are on a positive path that is resulting in reduced crime, lowered poverty, calmer traffic, planned growth and an improved process in doing business with the city. One of the main reasons we are seeing such success is the collaborations we have with the School Board, the County, the State, Savannah State, Georgia Southern, and all our business and community partners. Together we are one city, moving in one direction, and that is forward. It is a privilege to serve as your Mayor, and I will continue to work with the Alderman and all our community partners daily to take Savannah to new highs.

Thank you very much for being here tonight, and May God Bless the City of Savannah.

Rev. Thurmond did a closing prayer.

There being no further business, Mayor DeLoach declared this meeting of Council adjourned.

The video recording of the Council meeting can be found by copying and pasting the below link in your url: <https://savannahgovtv.viebit.com/player.php?hash=Is5TiWiKW43K>

Luciana M. Spracher
Acting Clerk of Council