



**FEBRUARY 12, 2026 - 11:00 a.m. - WORKSHOP and CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING  
CITY GOVERNMENT**

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN  
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA**

The work session was held at **11:03 a.m.**, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Media Room. Mayor Johnson, called the meeting to order, then recognized Ald. Kurtis Purtee to offer a prayer.

**PRESENT:**

Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, Presiding  
Alderwoman Carolyn H. Bell, At-Large, Post 1  
Alderwoman Alicia Miller Blakely, At-Large, Post 2  
Alderwoman Bernetta B. Lanier, District 1  
Alderman Detric Leggett, District 2  
Alderwoman Linda Wilder-Bryan, District 3 - Vice Chair  
Alderman Nick Palumbo, District 4 - Chairman  
Alderwoman Dr. Estella Edwards Shabazz, District 5 - Mayor Pro Tem

**ALSO, PRESENT:**

City Manager Jay Melder  
Chief of Staff Daphanie Williams  
City Attorney Bates Lovett  
Clerk of Council Mark Massey  
Deputy Clerk of Council Gwendolyn Jones

**Workshop Agenda Items**

[1. St. Patrick's Day Update](#)

[2026 St. Patricks Day Parade and Events.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder stated that the St. Patrick's Day preparation is brought to the City Council in a workshop because of the heightened nature of this public safety event. He stated that he wanted to make sure the council is well aware of the preparation that we (city staff) go through, along with state and federal partners, from a public safety perspective. Special Events, Film & Tourism Sr. Director Jason Pagliaro and City Manager Melder presented the St. Patrick's Day Update.

During and following the presentation, there were questions and comments from members of the City Council:

In response to the City Manager's explanation of food truck spot selection (24 of the 27 available spots are from the city of Savannah), Mayor Johnson stated that if you are paying for a business license and you are a Savannah business, this is your home field advantage. Mayor Johnson asked if we could codify an ordinance so that it becomes mandatory rather than permissive. He also asked the council for a consensus to instruct the City Manager to work on an ordinance.

Ald. Palumbo stated that there was an increased demand for entrepreneurs to be able to serve as vendors. He asked how it was currently being managed for any small businesses that wanted to vend during the event. City Manager Melder replied.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that a lot of those (food truck) spots are key spots. She asked that, when we do that ordinance, could the lottery be used for the selection of the spots?

Ald. Miller Blakely stated that she was told by some of the vendors and entrepreneurs in the community that they are being charged another fee (\$500) to participate in the St. Patrick's Day activities. She stated that if it is true, we need to re-look at that because if they are already paying for the permit to actually have a business here in the city, then why are we charging them double on that particular day? Ald. Miller Blakely thanked City Manager Melder for meeting with one of the food truck owners.

Ald. Leggett stated that he knew that some people were going to be able to address their lack of having business licenses or that their business licenses had expired on that day. He asked what messages we are sending to people who are not adhering to the rule. City Manager Melder explained. Ald. Leggett asked what enforcement looks like for the city marshals. He stated that he wanted to make sure that if we are going to enforce the entire zone, we want to make sure the entire zone is really being monitored, enforced, and reported back to our command.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that this is really a pleasant conversation here for this administration to actually make law and to create more teeth into our ordinances so that the Savannah businesses, who operate in this environment for 365 days of the year, are first.

Ald. Bell stated that she agreed with the Mayor's comment in the beginning that we codify some of these suggestions so we would not have to have the same conversation again next year. She thanked the City Manager for listening to the council members, especially their representatives.

Ald. Lanier stated that she was sure that there had been some extensive conversations about the security measures with SPD. She asked, with us being somewhat understaffed with SPD, how this was going to impact other areas of the city, and what we are doing to make sure that we have the right support in other areas. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated she wanted to make sure that we do something for our sanitation workers, who stay out there 24/7. She stated that we want to make sure it is equitable for everybody who is participating and working.

Ald. Leggett asked if we would be having some geo-fencing around certain areas of the city for ride shares and for people who ride those little bicycles, as they have in Washington. City Manager Melder stated that we have geo-fencing for ride shares, but because we do not license any scooter or bike shares, there is no geo-fencing here for them. Ald. Leggett stated, let's just make sure that our marshals, when they are out in the squares, have their eyes on the folks with the electric bicycles.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz asked, in reference to party buses, how we are going to control folks who are advertising all over the place and stating that they are going to have buses to meet out at Highway 204 or Interstate 95. Director Pagliaro and City Manager Melder explained.

Mayor Johnson stated that the state law allows us to have an additional day of liquor (a Sunday). He asked the City Manager if he had any thoughts or recommendations about it. The City Manager replied.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated that, in reference to our sanitation workers, she mentioned this to the City Manager before about a blitz that they normally get when they do St. Patrick's Day and other major events. She asked if it was possible to look at making sure that they get that. Ald.

Miller Blakely asked Chief of Government Operations Gene Prevatt to explain how the sanitation workers get fed on the day of the parade.

Ald. Leggett stated he wanted to make sure the City Manager knows that the Neighborhood Associations wanted to make sure that whoever the vendors are, who put up the no parking signs, take the signs and zip ties down. He expressed that the large portalets need to move, too, because they stay there a little longer than they should.

## [2. Public Safety Update](#)

[2026 Savannah Fire and SPD Presentation.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder introduced Fire Chief Minard and Deputy Fire Chief Handy to present the Fire Department's public safety update.

Following the Fire Public Safety update, there were comments and questions from Council Members:

In response to the Fire public safety presentation, Mayor Johnson asked if we saved any lives this year. (Yes) He stated that this council, at least these two administrations, has been very supportive of expanding our Basic Life Support (BLS). Mayor Johnson stated that because of the extremely efficient arrival times, three or four minutes, the fire department is often there before the police and way before the ambulances. He asked if we are at the point of where we have evaluated this to see whether we need to move further into some areas of the ALS (Advanced Life Support)? Mayor Johnson also asked if we had a defibrillator on all apparatuses. Chief Minard responded.

Ald. Purtee thanked Fire Chief Minard and stated that he really liked that he included in the priorities to expand mental health and peer support for public safety personnel. He stated that it sounds like it is a shared relationship. Ald. Purtee asked the following questions, to which Fire Chief Minard responded:

- Where are we in terms of being able to further supplement those priority medical calls?
- Do we have a rapid response team?
- Do we have paramedics who are hired within the Savannah Fire Department that can ride on those calls to be able to provide that lifesaving measures before Chatham EMS arrives on scene?

Ald. Purtee stated that, with a city our size and the size of the fire department, he thinks that is something that we need to look into, especially since we have seen a lot of news coverage over the wait times for EMS to arrive on scene. He stated that there is a big difference between four (4) minutes and fifteen (15) minutes to save a life. Ald. Purtee stated that it would behoove us to explore that option or opportunity for us to be able to have some sort of rapid response team where you have paramedics going to render aid in whatever manner they can until that transport unit gets there.

Ald. Lanier stated that there were three things she wanted to mention, and one was the mental health piece. She asked if the Fire department responded. Fire Chief Minard stated that those are medical calls that the Fire Department does not typically respond to.

Ald. Lanier stated that, looking at the total incident slide per District, she wanted to see if there was some kind of correlation. She asked Chief Minard what do you look for when looking at the numbers. (density, age of the structure, socioeconomics) Ald. Lanier stated that when you understand those numbers, then you can look at it like a pattern management tool.

Ald. Lanier stated that we have a great fire department, and we are so proud of these people receiving these accolades: Fire Investigator of the Year for the state of Georgia and nationally recognized Arson Investigation. She stated she would like to receive some information and some numbers on what we found at the Eastern Wharf fire and the Weeping Time fire.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked the following questions:

- What is the process if a citizen wanted to get their fire alarm and extinguisher inspected/replaced? (Contact the Fire Department's Fire Prevention office and schedule a home safety visit.)

- Does the Fire Department still give out fire alarms and carbon monoxide detectors? (The Fire Department has a partnership with the Red Cross.)

Ald. Miller Blakely stated she is excited about the public safety youth talent pipeline and asked the following questions:

- What are the ages?
- Is it going to take place during the summer?
- How is it going to work?

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked City Manager Melder and the Super Team Savannah for Fire Station 16, out at Hampstead West. She stated that the community had been asking for a public safety facility for some years now, and we finally cut the ribbon on it. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that the residents are very happy that we have gotten that done. She also thanked the Mayor and the Council for making sure that we resourced our public in that way.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that a lot of the time when you have fires, they are late at night, and in the 3rd District, she has been able to go and attend some. She stated that the fire department does a great job: they wear many hats, they connect with the Red Cross to let people know where they can go, and they have a partnership with the homeless authorities and all. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated she just wanted to tell them, "Kudos for that."

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked if, in regard to the elderly, the fire department could give (out fire alarms) at the meetings because the elderly are kind of particular about who comes into their homes.

Mayor Johnson replied to Ald. Wilder-Bryan's statement regarding the elderly receiving fire alarms by stating it was a grant program, and part of the grant was that they would be installed, because you could not necessarily ensure that they were installed properly. He further stated that another benefit we had was that, particularly for some of our senior saints, our firefighters had the opportunity to go into the house to see other things. There might be some other issues there that they can help access some wraparound services that we were able to get into.

Mayor Johnson stated we can figure out a way to manage both of those, but making sure (the fire alarms) are properly installed is important.

Following Fire's presentation, City Manager Melder introduced Police Chief Gunther, Assistant Police Chief Adams, and Assistant Police Chief Gavin to present the Savannah Police Department's (SPD) public safety update.

There were comments and questions from Council Members following the presentation:

Mayor Johnson expressed his concern about the goal of filling 50 vacancies by the end of the year. He stated that it costs us much more to have a substandard problem or someone else's problem from another department. Mayor Johnson stated that it has to be quality.

Ald. Purtee stated that he thinks this is important, considering that public safety is perhaps the top priority of this council. He stated that Mayor Johnson took the words right out of his mouth when he mentioned quality over quantity. Ald. Purtee asked the following questions:

- What is our sworn number? (519 authorized)
- What are we doing that is unique to the city of Savannah?
- What is the national average?

Ald. Purtee stated he is not so concerned about how many people or how many vacancies we are trying to fill. He stated he wants to know where we need to be, and we need to be beyond 519 (sworn personnel). Ald. Purtee stated that, based on averages, we should be pushing 620. He stated that he thinks we have to look at that in the budget for next year as we plan for those vacancies. It is not just about putting people in positions, but it is about putting quality in a position where public trust is placed.

Ald. Purtee stated that recruitment is great. He further stated that if we put as much focus on retention as we do recruitment, he thinks we would see some better outcomes. Ald. Purtee provided examples of incentives and stated that providing those incentives would actually help people in our community and the younger folks who want to do this profession. He stated that

recruiting and retention are national issues right now. So, we have to think outside the box to be a little more innovative on what we can do with our fine folks working for SPD.

Ald. Bell stated that, as policymakers, she would encourage us to place just as much attention on crime prevention. She shared her observation/experience when she traveled to Ghana, Africa. Ald. Bell stated that she did not see a great presence of police officers, but they have their own culture and way of life. Ald. Bell stated, let us think about how we are going to prevent, what methods we can employ to prevent, and how to bring more attention to focus on crime prevention.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that when we are talking about preventing crime, we cannot start with folks who are in middle school or people who are in high school. She stated she wanted to give her kudos to Assistant Chief Adams for continuously staying focused on our police athletic league and the Savannah Impact Program.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that we need more officer friendliness, and we want to make sure we put more people on these shifts at night. In reference to guns, Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked Police Chief Gunther to briefly tell the council about the parallel between guns that are stolen and the guns that are actually involved in these crimes on our street. Chief Gunther responded.

Ald. Leggett gave a special shout-out to our SIP Staff, Latoya Daniels, Coach Carter and a special shout-out to Sergeant Hurley. He also asked if there were any updates on the attack in the park. Ald. Leggett stated that we needed to let our community know that Savannah is going to continue to be a safe place, not only with us but with our partners, and we continue to ask people to register their cameras so that we do not have this type of action happening. Ald. Leggett asked if there were any updates on the River Street shooting? Chief Gunther responded.

Ald. Lanier thanked Chief Gunther for the presentation. She stated she was glad to hear that they are concentrating on hiring, recruiting, and retention. Ald. Lanier stated she received a phone call regarding a car being pulled over and was surrounded by nine police officers. She stated she got calls because there was one black officer (out of the nine). Ald. Lanier stated it is important that we still concentrate on diversity, quantity, and equality--it is the perception.

Ald. Lanier mentioned that there were no officers at the Woodville meeting last evening. She also stated she did not understand why the flock cameras work in a police environment and not in the sanitation and illegal dumping environment. Ald. Lanier stated the last thing was personal because she wanted her son's case settled. She stated it has been 13 years, three months, and 10 days, and at this point, she is ready to address this issue.

Mayor Johnson stated that we have the best police department in the world. He stated that this is not easy work and he was grateful for those men and women who stood up and took the oath to do what they do, particularly in a time in which there is scathing criticism of law enforcement officers and what they do. Mayor Johnson stated that pay is not a motivator, pay could be a demotivator, but mostly when people feel like they are not being treated fairly. He stated he thinks that there are things we can do to make living conditions and working conditions easy--he means, people are happy, people will stay.

Mayor Johnson stated he wanted to briefly reiterate the role that guns and illegal guns play in this economy. He stated that people can say what they want to about our gun ordinance, but we did something and for what we know, we had 99 less guns stolen in 2025 than we had in 2024. Mayor Johnson stated that if the governor signs the bill that is on his desk, we have some other ideas because we are charged with keeping this community safe.

Mayor Johnson stated that patrol is about visual inspections. He stated that while we have the opportunity of salary savings, we should consider some high-profile security companies for purposes of just patrol. Mayor Johnson stated we need to look at some alternative means until we are able to get our numbers up. Let us find ways of creating or even enhancing our reserve capabilities to be able to have the presence on the streets until we have the numbers that we see.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked Chief Gunther if we have sensitivity and cultural training in the department when we bring on somebody new. Chief Gunther and Mayor Johnson replied.

[3. Executive Session Regarding Personnel, Real Estate and Litigation; As Needed](#)

HELD. Mayor Johnson entertained a motion to hold an executive session. Ald. Purtee moved to hold an executive session regarding litigation and real estate, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

At 12:54 p.m., Mayor Johnson recessed the work session for the executive session to be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor in the City Manager’s conference room, which began at 1:39 p.m. All members were present, including City Manager Jay Melder, City Attorney Bates Lovett, and Clerk of Council Mark Massey. Also attending were Housing Services Director Martin Fretty and Assistant City Attorney Tara Hicks.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan moved to adjourn the executive session/workshop, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

[4. City Manager Updates](#)

There was no City Manager's update held.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop upon conclusion of the executive session at 2:03 p.m. No action was taken.

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

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

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

The video recording of the Workshop can be found by copying and inserting the link below in your url:

<https://www.youtube.com/@cityofsavannah/videos>

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