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**AUGUST 27, 2026 - 10:00 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 **10:04 a.m.**, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Media Room. Mayor Johnson, called the meeting to order, then recognized Alderman Kurtis Purtee to offer a prayer.

**PRESENT:**

Mayor Van R. Johnson, II  
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, District 3 - Vice Chair  
Alderman Nick Palumbo, District 4 - Chairman  
Alderwoman Dr. Estella Edwards Shabazz, District 5 - Mayor Pro Tem  
Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

**ALSO, PRESENT:**

City Manager Jay Melder  
Assistant City Manager Taffanye Young  
City Attorney Bates Lovett  
Clerk of Council Mark Massey  
Deputy Clerk of Council Gwendolyn Jones

**Workshop Agenda Items**

[1. Housing Toolkit Ordinance Discussion](#)

[1. Housing Toolkit Ordinance Presentation.pdf](#)

Mayor Johnson recognized City Manager Jay Melder's birthday. First, Mayor Johnson reminded Council that they had asked staff to advance on matters being discussed this day. He also reminded Council that they asked staff during the strategic planning process to redefine the relationship with the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), with recommendations from the City Manager and the City Attorney. The MPC is a contractor of the City of Savannah, and their role is to provide advice and recommendations. The City Council can choose to accept, reject, or modify those recommendations. Mayor Johnson stated we want to make sure that the

processes reflect those relationships. Mayor Johnson also indicated the Council had received letters relating to zoning from various neighborhood associations, including the Historic Savannah Foundation, Downtown, Victorian, Thomas Square, Cuyler Brownville and Ardsley Park neighborhood associations, Oglethorpe Plan Coalition, Beehive Foundation, and Forsyth Park Alliance. He asked for confirmation that the Clerk and the Council received the letter (Yes). Secondly, regarding the previously held mobile tour, he stated we continue to put tools in our toolbox. We asked the city manager and staff to come back with more tools to address issues of housing affordability. Staff did what we asked them to do, and they have come forward with it. Today we will dive deeper. He stated we will have a working lunch, and we need an executive session later for real estate and litigation. Lastly, he stated we are having issues with our elevator and it is being replaced later this year. Lunch will be held in the media room, with food set up in the Mayor's suite. Mayor Johnson turned the Housing Toolkit presentation over to the City Manager.

City Manager Melder updated the City Council regarding the elevator repairs and replacement contract approved by the City Council and scheduled to take place in December after the last City Council Meeting to be held on December 10th. There are two ADA viewing stations today on the first floor and sub-basement levels for any resident to be able to make comments from those areas. He apologized to anyone who made the climb on the marble stairs.

City Manager Melder began with the housing toolkit tour and the proposed amendments. It was placed on the August 13, 2026 City Council Meeting Agenda for second reading. Then he invited Planning Manager John Anagnost, who also attended the tour, to make a presentation, along with recognizing MPC Executive Director and CEO Melanie Wilson and MPC Vice Chairman Tom Woiwode. MPC Board Member Joseph Ervin joined later.

Following Mr. Anagnost's presentation, Ms. Wilson spoke about how the MPC assisted staff with the housing toolkit efforts. She indicated some concerns about how changes will be enforced and any unintended consequences from the standpoint of setback reductions during the implementation process. Adjustments may need to be made.

Mayor Johnson spoke about how this issue was brought up in the past by Council. He inquired whether the Council was fully engaged in this effort. The City Manager responded yes by naming the various efforts taken by the City locally and at the state level, which he described as a pulling on all levers. The City Manager also spoke on the need to study the market and its impacts.

Ald. Palumbo agreed that a bold challenge requires bold solutions. Changes and reassessments will need to be made.

Ald. Wilder stated we have a foot halfway on the gas. Regarding E. 36th Street (by right) recommendations, she is scared and cautious. "By right" interpretations are being made by staff, and people who need assistance are not getting what they need. There is a lot of development going on in her District by people who do not live there, due to finances. What's missing here is the finances, so how do we get people who live here to be able to afford housing within the are?. Compatibility is now an issue due to people moving here from other places. We can do better than what we are doing with respect to affordable housing, and we have to get the word out. Additionally, we need to improve monitoring. 2840 Wicklow Street is an example where multiple parties were involved. She described an experience of frustration when developers came in and agreements were not in place. \$400,000 was given in the Third District to Savannah Affordable Housing; are other developers being held to those standards? Who is monitoring? Regarding 2822 Bee Road, we need to work on the overlay boundaries. People needing housing are being displaced because they cannot get the financing. Regarding 1109 E. 32nd Street, Ms. Paxton received all kinds of tax incentives, a low interest rate, and tap-ins to defray costs. Although we have a lot of good programs, what good is it if it is not reaching people who need it? Regarding zoning amendments, we have a workshop, and then she is being asked to vote on it. People are rushing to do the ordinances and text amendments, but today she is asking to say, "let's stop", because we have to do better for people like city employees who are not feeling the City right now. City Manager Melder responded. Ald. Wilder reiterated that the programs are not affecting the people that need the assistance. Who is handling the compliance? She got elected because people were talking to her, and now there is

a problem when people talk to them. City Manager Melder responded. Ald. Wilder responded regarding the elderly water bills being cut-off. She is one of the first to approve recommendations from the City Manager, but what good is a recommendation if it is not doing what it is supposed to do?

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz commented that, as a voice for the people she is requesting to pull back. These decisions (zoning, text amendments, and the comprehensive plan) will shape and mold our City. She wants to continue to hear this information, but we must put the brakes on some of the issues today.

Ald. Leggett indicated that a resident called him and Ald. Miller Blakely regarding 1109 E. 32nd Street. The Second District is highly developed, and there is a lot of interest and development going on. He is not sure where and how city staff is not picking up on these things. A lot of complaints have been made, including a lack of permits. Ald. Leggett asked the City Manager if a lot of the requirements are being removed with this recommendation. City Manager Melder responded. Ald. Leggett further described what is going on with the property located at 1109 E. 32nd Street. City Manager Melder responded. Ald. Leggett stated they want to maintain the character of the communities wherever new development goes in.

Ald. Purtee commended folks for the work and properties within the Sixth District which are moving forward and are appropriate for the areas. He stated we want to see more walkability and density downtown. Also, we want to see more housing that is affordable, not only single-family homes, but condos, townhomes, and cottages.

Ald. Lanier stated we all realize the population is increasing in our city, and based on the tour, we can utilize all of those different housing types. Where and how we apply this is very important. It is not a one-size-fits-all application. Larger businesses and office lots on the south side could accommodate this without impacting the surrounding communities, as opposed to a business lot on West Bay Street that's just the size of a residential lot. She expressed to the City Manager her concern about the size and whether staff could have a conversation and work that out. Ald. Lanier stated that in the First District, especially in the older, greater west side, we desire density because over the years, population has decreased, likely 50%. There were once several grocery stores, but as a result of white flight and displacement, they no longer qualify for a grocery store. They met with Kroger representatives in the past who stated they needed rooftops and more people to justify that type of quality. She worked as a community representative under the OldZo and NewZo, where she brought issues to the table like impact fees, inclusionary zoning, ADUs, duplexes, and community benefit agreements. None of those things made it into the policy. We are moving a little slow about providing things we need for the first district. She expressed that we are putting the cart before the horse by allowing different housing types, and then to come back later to do the inclusionary zoning to make it a requirement for developers to have a percentage set aside for affordability. If we are going to do this, we need to know when we are coming back. Ald. Lanier posed the question of when will we come back with some policies to ensure that developers create affordable units?

Ald. Lanier mentioned the stop in Woodville while on the mobile tour. She expressed her concerns regarding the price point of houses that are now being developed in that area compared to a few years ago. Ald. Lanier stated that it is good to have the ADUs, but this type of development will create displacement that will force people out. The people who live there cannot afford to move down the street or have their kids to come back home and purchase in the community. ADUs and duplexes would allow that, but not \$400,000 homes. Ald. Lanier stated there was a problem of recombination and zoning that we have not dealt with. The problem is that there are some commercial lots that are too small to do what they intended to on those lots. So they are purchasing residential lots in the rear and automatically that rear lot becomes, by right, commercial. Ald. Lanier stated that we do not want commercial intrusion into these historic neighborhoods. She stated that Ms. Wilson talked about the enforcement and she would like to hear her explain that. Ald. Lanier posed a series of questions regarding the matter: what is happening there, what do we need to do, why we are not enforcing, is there no compliance, what type of guardrails do we need to put in place? Ald. Lanier also mentioned the ribbon-cutting of the apartments for the medically fragile homeless people in Cuyler Brownville. She expressed that this type of development is what we need and could support

because it is not a negative impact on the community. The community could absorb these types of developments without changing their whole character or nature, unlike what the Salvation Army is trying to do.

Ald. Lanier referenced the visitation of 32nd Street--one of the stops on the mobile housing tour. Ald. Lanier stated the applicant/developer/resident was given or allowed a lot of different incentives. She then asked what was that zoning called. (Affordable Housing Density Overlay) Ald. Lanier expressed concerns regarding developers who are definitely providing affordable housing but they are not given any breaks. She stated that we need to make sure that when the building department is working with applicants/developers, they make the them aware of the waivers, benefits, and incentives because we get a lot of calls about people who are running into roadblocks and fees and prices going up. City Manager Melder responded. Ald. Lanier further expressed her concerns regarding West Bay Street which is a gateway coming into downtown. She stated it has never made the list for being a targeted economic gateway. Although, we have the business designation in place now, people have not really been using that model of having the retail on the bottom and the houses up top. Ald. Lanier stated that when she tried to envision what could happen, she saw Montgomery Street and these big apartment buildings sitting right there on Bay Street as people travel into downtown. She stated the height was not what concerned her. What concerned her was that now we are not giving the community what they have been requesting, which was community-friendly retail that would support the build and the community as the neighborhood continues to grow. Ald. Lanier stated density was coming back, so, we need retail. So, we need to make sure that we accommodate and plan for this growth and development so that we do not make it more difficult for the retail to be there that will support the people who are already there. City Manager responded.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated she mirrors the sentiments of the council members when they talk about this affordable housing overlay ordinance. She stated we need to go back to the drawing board with this. She explained the reason for her statement involved a phone call from resident at 1109 East 32nd Street. Ald. Miller Blakely shared the details of the incident and asked about checks and balances. She stated this situation should have never happened. Ald. Miller Blakely also asked what was considered affordable because after receiving all of those incentives, the property owner will be renting the apartment for almost \$2000. City Manager Melder and Ms. Wilson responded.

Ald. Bell stated there is an advantage of being a district alderman versus an at-large alderman. One of the advantages was that under normal circumstances, you get to intimately know the people in your district that have concerns. Ald. Bell stated that she has learned something from members of this administration. She shared what she thought Ald. Wilder was expressing during the meeting. Ald. Bell stated she was impressed that one of Ald. Wilder's major concerns was not for the developers who are coming in and adding housing, but was for her residents who have been there all of their lives--how will they benefit? Ald. Bell stated that, although the rules are the same for everybody, what she was hearing was that the message, perhaps an understanding or interpretation of the rules, is not getting to the people who are residents that have lived here all of their lives, who can own their properties, and who can take advantage of the opportunities.

Ald. Wilder stated she was on the affordability tour with staff and they did an amazing job. She expressed that the Council does not receive an opportunity to really talk about the things that are important--it is not timely. Ald. Wilder stated staff gave the council information that they needed to move forward, but we cannot if the process is not equitable and economically affordable for everybody. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Palumbo noted that this may not pass this day and may need more time, but it was very important to him that in his district it passes. Every district is not the same and every district has different needs. Ald. Palumbo has a large commercial district right in the middle, and for the many things that the Council saw on the tour, are things that he personally worked on and had to spend years to be able to achieve. He understood that the Council did not want to pass it on this day and that they wanted more time, but asked the Council to please pass it for the 4th and 6th Districts today. Ald. Palumbo stated we have been working on this for a long time and he

knows that it's good and it's going to help. He mentioned the Sears that was filled with asbestos, and now there is investment that is coming into play. So, some of these principles are working, but for it to continue working, we need to enshrine it in the code.

Mayor Johnson expressed that the Council was not the City Council of the First, Fourth, Fifth, Second, Third District. We are City Council for the City of Savannah. We agree that we are in need of housing. We recognize that we are on the losing end of affordability that the people are addressing every day. We have charged our city government to do something about it. Mayor Johnson stated this is here because we asked them to bring it to us and they did what we asked them to do. He expressed that here they have some opportunities to have a strong, result-based, best-practice-based policy that has recommended actions that continue to give you tools to work from and give staff the opportunity to be able to tweak as necessary.

Ald. Lanier asked about the pros and cons of having the inclusionary zoning included as the Council does this or very shortly after. What are the drawbacks? City Manager Melder responded.

## [2. Proposed Zoning Text Amendment for Zoning Applications Discussion](#)

### [2. Proposed Zoning Text Amendment for Zoning Applications Presentation.pdf](#)

Presented by City Manager Melder, City Attorney Lovett, Senior Director of Planning & Urban Design Bridget Lidy, Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) Executive Director & CEO Melanie Wilson, and MPC Vice Chairman Tom Woiwode.

Following the presentation, members of City Council discussed and asked questions.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked the following questions:

- Why did we implement a planning department with the City of Savannah when we already had MPC? (Between 2016 and 2017)
- Why are we doing all of these changes? (The responsibilities of the City have not changed.)
- Could Ms. Wilson address some of the concerns that the MPC has in reference to this? City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Lanier asked for clarification regarding MPC's responsibility for the comprehensive plan amendments. (Any comprehensive plan amendments go to the MPC for review, analysis, and recommendations to the City Council.) City Manager Melder further explained the proposed changes. Ald. Lanier asked for an example of what a special project and planning initiative looks like that would remain with the City. (The Canal District, Civic Legacy Plan, Eastside Legacy Plan, Southside Legacy Plan, the Railroad District, etc.) She further asked if the Data Center would be considered a special project. (No)

Ald. Miller Blakely asked Ms. Wilson if MPC had any issues with any of this. Ms. Wilson responded.

Mayor Johnson stated the City is ultimately responsible for the City and the notice is never a problem, but to the City Attorney's point, the legislative body needs to retain the rights and the authority of the legislative body to include making decisions that the legislative body now or in the future feels are prudent and necessary. He stated he does not know what the issue was in terms of the notice. If that was what we were planning to do, then that was what we are planning to do. He asked City Manager Melder what his thoughts were regarding the 30-day notice. City Manager Melder responded. Mayor Johnson then asked the City Attorney to weigh in on the discussion regarding the notice and whether something such as emergent situations could be defined. City Attorney Lovett responded.

Ald. Wilder asked the following questions:

- If the legislature in the 50s decided that MPC would be over the comprehensive plan, what is the legislature that takes this on?
- Why now that we would not want MPC to know everything that they are directly involved in?
- What do we do about county people voting on stuff that affects the people in the city?

Ald. Wilder expressed her concerns regarding the changes. She stated she would only vote for the changing of the name.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked why now. We are getting ready to change what has been in place-- MPC has been in place to be other eyes and ears. Ald. Miller Blakely stated MPC does not agree with the City's proposal and is proposing a 30-day notice. Ms. Wilson provided clarification about the proposed changes. Ald. Miller Blakely asked why we are changing this portion (the comprehensive plan component), and further expressed her concerns regarding the changes.

Ald. Lanier stated we are talking about two things regarding the comprehensive plan and the rezoning text amendment initiated by the Mayor and Aldermen, and around those two issues, we are talking about time and authorities. She thinks that we could structure some language so that, if it is time-sensitive, then we could circumvent that. As far as the authority, Ald. Lanier stated she likes having the extra level of scrutiny of the MPC because of the level of professionals that we have there and what they are required to do with their charges. Ald. Lanier stated that the Council do not always agree with the recommendation and we do not have to accept the recommendation, but do let them do what they are charged to do and look at this stuff. And if it is time-sensitive, then let's have a method in place for dealing with that.

Ald. Palumbo stated that he only had one big thing to say, and it was in thinking about what the City Attorney advised us as a governing body. The City Attorney said, "don't give up a power that you already retain," which begs another question: if we give up a power that we already retain, who are we giving it to? Ald. Palumbo expressed that he would not give a power to our county over our judgment. Regardless of where they are appointed, their geography, where they live, ultimately those members are accountable to the county appointees--to their whims, aims, and vision. Ald. Palumbo mentioned the signed joint letter from the historic neighborhoods demanding action at a minimum that the Council has a governing body that is accountable to us (the City Council) that can remain independent but accountable at the same time just like our Land Bank Authority and Ethics Commission. He stated it is time for us to take the next step and determine something that works in the 21st century for us, is accountable to us, and that can still be the MPC. It could still be Ms. Wilson, but at least we have the accountability and the independence that we deserve.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that certain things need to be changed, but not all things need to be changed. The City of Savannah, the Mayor and City Council, are not giving our authority to nobody. The Metropolitan Planning Commission is making a vote as the planning commission, not a city, not a county. She expressed that her vote would be not to change anything from the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries.

Ald. Leggett stated that the Council came to the table asking about processes. He explained that when the petitioner goes to the MPC and spends their money that they won't get back, and then comes to the City Council, we have to relitigate their petition on the dais. Ald. Leggett stated he understood that we get a 15-day notice period for the public hearing to happen at City Council. So between that time, the Council just wanted to make sure that there was something that we could read over or something that we can be versed in before it becomes an issue at City Council. We just want to be a part of the process before it comes to the Council.

Mayor Johnson stated that the Council clearly needs a deeper dive on the governance issue. He stated that he would like to propose to Council that they come back with a method to do that deeper dive. Mayor Johnson stated he thinks the Council should be able to move forward on the 85%--the proposed text amendments and public notification. He reiterated that there was no pressure for us to have to do the governance piece now, and that allows us the time to really be thoughtful and maybe engage more for public input.

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

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz moved to hold an executive session regarding real estate, seconded by Ald. Miller Blakely and Ald. Palumbo. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

Executive session started at 1:31 p.m. All City Council members were present, including City Manager Melder, City Attorney Lovett, Clerk Massey, and RCL Co. consultant Evan Farrar who

presented studies on the Civic Center Site, Canal District, and Railroad District.

No action was taken during executive session. The executive session concluded at 2:04 p.m.

[4. City Manager's Update: As Needed](#)

[Exhibit 1: Tuesday Night Memo Final 08252026.pdf](#)

No City Manager's Update was held.

The workshop and executive session were adjourned at 2:04 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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