



DECEMBER 11, 2025 - 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 **11:02 a.m.**, in the 2nd Floor Media Room. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz 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
Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

ALSO, PRESENT:

City Manager Jay Melder
Assistant City Manager Taffanye Young
Chief of Staff Daphanie Williams
City Attorney Bates Lovett
Deputy Clerk of Council Gwendolyn Jones
Assistant to the Clerk of Council Renee Osborne

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Adding to the Housing Toolkit Discussion](#)

[1. Adding to the Housing Toolkit Discussion presentation.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder introduced the item, stated that this item is a kickoff to next year's work plan in terms of policy around one of council's key priorities, which is housing. He turned the presentation over to Planning & Urban Design Planning Manager John Anagnost and Housing Services Sr. Director Martin Fretty.

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

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz asked the following questions:

- What procedures are we thinking about to try to help developers lessen their cost for development, renovations, or restoration in reference to changing some of those design standards in some of our areas like Cuyler-Brownville area, and our historic areas downtown where those restrictions are so heavy? (Mr. Fretty stated that they are looking at what they can do to make things sensible that preserves the architectural history of the neighborhood without making it so cost prohibitive that the historical citizens that lived in the neighborhood cannot afford to live in the neighborhood anymore.)
- Are there any other type of methods for identifying Savannah's jurisdiction besides using the US Census tracks? (This tool provides data at the most granular level.)
- In reference to fee in lieu and best practices throughout the state or communities, is this considered just information going through state law or the control of the city? (It is a common inclusionary zoning practice...it is a tool in which you are providing some affordable housing benefit, even if the affordable housing is not built on that site.)
- In reference to AMI, using the example of type one, two, and three, what range of income are we talking about when we talk about 15% of a unit at 80 to 100% AMI? (City Manager Melder explained.)

Ald. Palumbo stated if it is something that Savannah does not have yet and it is in Atlanta, let us go check it out, see it, tackle it in the field, and see them practice it when we go for Savannah Chatham Day. He stated that this is a better way for them to wrap their heads around it because it is so difficult for them to get it to jump off the page.

Ald. Bell stated Ald. Palumbo's statement was a great segue to what she was going to ask. She asked City Manager Melder if there are best practices, in which he identified cities where inclusionary zoning is in progress or taking place. (Yes) Ald. Bell stated she would go as far as her colleague has stated that it would be good if council could see some of those examples.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked if there is a traditional neighborhood on the southside that you can refer to that she would know about. Mr. Anagnost responded. Ald. Miller Blakely stated that she remembered when the Eastern Wharf was developed and they used the numbers from Fred Wessels in Hitch Village. She asked what did they use those numbers for. (opportunity zones) Ald. Miller Blakely stated that the numbers that they used were supposed to benefit the people that lived in Hitch Village in the Fred Wessels community, but unfortunately that never happened because there was no affordable housing over there. She also asked if that area was a tax allocated district (TAD), and was the TAD still in place. City Manager stated he would confirm the information with her later that day.

Ald. Miller Blakely also expressed her concerns about the development at Oglethorpe Mall, and stated she do not want to see something developed like that in another area. She asked how did that come about. (City Council approved it.) Ald. Miller Blakely also asked the following questions regarding the creation of a project manager position, in which City Manager Melder responded:

- Do we not have somebody in our permitting office that does that already?
- Why would we have to create a position?
- Will there be a position created in that department where you would hire someone else or would you increase the salary?

Ald. Purtee stated that it was really interesting as we look at the census tracks and the fee areas one, two, and three, you may notice the lighter yellow areas and other areas that are either warehouse or undeveloped areas which is unique. He stated that he thinks there is opportunity there. Ald. Purtee noted that what is at the Oglethorpe Mall, is working in other cities he has visited. He stated that not only does the housing help sustain the mall and sustain the businesses that are there, but it also adds to the quality of life for individuals that are living in those areas. Ald. Purtee expressed that we are not gaining land around here, so he thinks the biggest thing for us is that we look at if we cannot grow out, we have to grow up. He stated he has looked at the Congress for the New Urbanism Plan and it is amazing what we can do, what

we are able to do. Ald. Purtee stated that he thinks we have to be open-minded to be able to grow up with this housing project and there is going to be some give and take. He further stated that with height comes density, and with density comes challenges with parking and traffic, and a whole other discussion regarding public transit and walkability.

Ald. Purtee stated there is opportunity to visit other areas that are really pushing inclusionary zoning and some of the unique areas where they may have retrofitted their areas to bring more housing and more development such as housing, retail, and different amenities. Ald. Purtee stated that he thinks we have to do some outside of the box thinking, and this is just the first of many steps as we try to bring more housing into Savannah.

Ald. Leggett referred to the Affordable Housing Fee Area Map by asking if assigned type one area included the river. (The map was broken up by US Census Tracts.) Ald. Leggett expressed that when we start talking about affordable housing, we have to be careful because it looks like you guys are dangling affordable housing in front of us to incentivize the developers. He stated that he thinks what we need to do right now, when we send our legislative agenda to Atlanta, is to put a rent cap in place to make sure that we are really trying to have affordable housing. He further stated that if you really pay attention to what is going on in the downtown region, especially in the Frazier Homes, Kayton Homes, and Yamacraw, more specifically, these people are actually being systematically moved out. So, where are they going to go if we look at the map and how the census tract is put together? Ald. Leggett expressed that we (the council) want to make sure that they are able to go someplace where it is affordable, but not market rate. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Leggett also expressed his concerns about permitting and asked if we have enough staff to check behind people who are breaking ground, tearing down buildings, putting up new structures in the area. Mayor Johnson stated that is an enforcement issue and if someone is trying to build that they have the permits to build and to demolish. We have to be able to regulate that.

Mayor Johnson stated that we (the council) talked about ADUs and inclusionary zoning. He stated that it is going to require some hard decisions and some hard courage against push back that we know is just natural to this process. He stated that everybody wants the greater good until the greater good is on their block. Mayor Johnson stated that he feels confident as we move forward into 2026 that we will continue to be given some additional tools, and he is hoping again, that for council it is going to take some courage to be able to really not only articulate the greater good, but to be able to go beyond people's initial objections to do what is right.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated the inclusionary zoning actually decreases the development with housing--it makes it less affordable. She stated a couple of years ago, council members visited Atlanta, who was one of the first ones to use the inclusionary zoning in Georgia. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that they are having problems.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that we are not thinking about the traditional people who live there, and our planning is not resident friendly. She asked if we could use this toolbox in certain places and not others. City Manager explained. Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked for the consideration of getting a taskforce that consists of developers and citizens.

Mayor Johnson stated he wanted to bring the team back, the Housing Savannah Taskforce to re-evaluate to see where we are now. He stated that they will get them back out again to re-evaluate Savannah and make new recommendations, and he thinks the GPS would be an awesome way of finding out.

Ald. Lanier stated that she was excited because she thinks we are underestimating the opportunities we have in front of us for the transformation that is coming to Savannah - transformational Savannah. She stated that we are really at the helm of that and this discussion is pivotal. Ald. Lanier stated that when it comes to the housing piece, we can use all of these tools; where we place them is going to be the important thing. She asked to please let us allow the communities to drive where that is. Ald. Lanier stated that we have a monumental once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do some things, but we got to have vision.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated she was thankful for the affordable housing presentation, but she would also like to hear more about income-based housing.

[2. Civic Legacy Update](#)

[2. Civic Legacy Update presentation.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder thanked the City Council for their leadership and vision on this matter, and introduced the All-Star team to present the Civic Legacy update. The presenters included Municipal Archives & History Officer Luciana Spracher, Real Estate Services and Capital Projects Management Senior Director Cristy Lawrence, Craig Clements with Sottile & Sottile, Dr. Erika Tate with BluKnowledge, and Shedrick Coleman with SHEDDarchitecture.

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

Mayor Johnson stated that we (the council) have to appreciate the work that you all have done in this, and this is a very important pivotal moment that we did not have the opportunity to involve ourselves in the last 50 years. He stated that for us there is a couple of opportunities. The first opportunity is to make sure that we are perpetuating or propelling our community forward through the use of this space. Mayor Johnson stated that one of the compelling questions was what about the arena. He stated that the current arena is just not usable in any way, shape or form, and it needs to come down. Mayor Johnson stated that we need to be consistent about what we say we are going to do. So, for us, here comes an opportunity to name the entire civic center, inclusive of the Johnny Mercer Theater, the ballrooms, and meeting rooms after Martin Luther King. He stated that there is no better time to do that except during Martin Luther King weekend.

Mayor Johnson stated this is a big decision by this council, but it is a great opportunity for us to submit some legacy forward on the 17th of January, 2026.

Ald. Purtee stated we talk about legacy; Luciana Spracher does a wonderful job of oral history with telling a story that we have in the city. He further stated he would be remiss if he did not mention Marty Johnston and her role in this entire existence of this civic center. Ald. Purtee stated with telling the story, it was not just about who was there or who showed up to perform, but it was about how that building, how that space impacted the community and what it meant to folks in our community. He stated he thinks Marty is a wonderful asset to be able to tell that story moving forward.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked the following questions:

- When we say we want to get back on the Oglethorpe plan, what is the legislative impact regarding naming the square?
- Does council really wanted to go back and name it the Elbert Square?
- Can we name it the people's square or something else?
- Do we have to have the same number?
- In light of having another square that we could possibly name with more Africian American people, is there a possibility to even consider not renaming it the Elbert Square?

Ald. Miller Blakely asked that as a place of honor where the community rooms are, could we look at the possibility of renaming those rooms as well.

Ald. Lanier stated that she may have been one of the most critical ones on the council on this project and not because she could not envision what it could be or what it could look like, but she did not like the fact that we were losing the arena without creating another space somewhere else. She stated that she knows that it has been a very popular place for people as far as affordability and accessing a venue for the community in Savannah, but after she heard what was presented, she stated that was an excellent idea, and she really liked the work that was done.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the City Manager and team for the work that they have done. She stated that this is definitely a monumental time at this table and she was excited.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the Mayor for coming up with the vision in having that day (January 17, 2026) to celebrate.

Ald. Leggett asked the following questions:

- Could council receive some benchmarks as the project is moving forward so that they will know where the project is?
- With doing demolition on the inside, could council receive some updates as they get to certain portions?
- Is there a GPS plan for the maintenance to our facility so the we do not run into another demolition by neglect issue?

3. Executive Session Regarding Personnel, Real Estate and Litigation: As Needed

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

At 1:44 p.m., Mayor Johnson recessed the work session for the executive session to be held on the 3th Floor in the City Attorney's conference room, which began at 1:54 p.m. All members were present. Also attending were City Manager Jay Melder, City Attorney Bates Lovett, and Deputy Clerk of Council Gwendolyn Jones.

Ald. Palumbo 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 2:20 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>

