



**JUNE 11, 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 Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz to offer a prayer.

**PRESENT:**

Mayor Van R. Johnson, II  
Alderswoman Carolyn H. Bell, At-Large, Post 1  
Alderswoman Alicia Miller Blakely, At-Large, Post 2  
Alderswoman Bernetta B. Lanier, District 1  
Alderman Detric Leggett, District 2  
Alderswoman Linda Wilder, District 3 - Vice Chair  
Alderman Nick Palumbo, District 4 - Chairman  
Alderswoman 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  
Clerk of Council Mark Massey  
Deputy Clerk of Council Gwendolyn Jones

**Workshop Agenda Items**

[1. City of Savannah Homelessness Efforts- 5yr Report](#)

[1. Five Year Homelessness Review 20260611.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder gave a brief overview of the 5-year report regarding homelessness efforts. He then introduced the following presenters: Chief of Community Services Ashley Reynolds-Marshall, Chatham Savannah Authority for Homeless CEO and Executive Director Jennifer DuLong, and Savannah/Chatham Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director Stephanie Kaple.

Mayor Johnson thanked the council and the council immediately before for adopting the mantra, the vision statement that says "Savannah will be a safe, environmentally healthy, economically thriving community for all." He stated the operative word was "all." Mayor Johnson further expressed that Savannah was not going to be the place necessarily, totally, and exclusively for the rich and famous, but a city that would lead with love and compassion for all, and all means all. He shared how he convened all of the homeless service providers in one room and asked them, "How do we fix this?" Mayor Johnson noted that the council's leadership was the solution. The council created the ICH (Interagency Council on Homelessness) and a continuum of care that is not only deep but also wide. Mayor Johnson stated that the US Conference of Mayors, the National League of Cities, and the Georgia Municipal Association have all asked about how we were able to do some of the things that we have been able to do. He stated the simple answer was that we did it together. Mayor Johnson thanked the City Manager and his team and all of the partners for taking the vision and operationalizing it.

Mayor Johnson shared that he, along with City Manager Melder and Chief of Public Information & Affairs Joe Shearouse, were able to talk to the Department of Veterans Affairs about how we have been able to reduce homeless veterans close to functional zero. He stated they were able to tell that to the United States government and use that as a platform to ask for more support for our veteran community. Mayor Johnson further stated that we have a lot more to do, a lot further to go, a lot more opportunities, but it does not negate the work that has been done, which is phenomenal and absolutely game-changing.

Mayor Johnson also mentioned the ribbon cutting for the amazing day center, which he had the opportunity to tour. He stated it was not only a labor of love through Union Mission and partnerships, but it is a one-stop shop where people are treated with dignity and are able to charge their phones, wash their clothes, have food, and receive health care services in an air-conditioned space. Mayor Johnson stated he was looking forward to the opportunity, with this council leading the way again, to ensure our southside has a similar, equally brilliant state-of-the-art facility as well.

Ald. Purtee shared about the number of years of experience he has worked with the roofless community within the city, county, and various municipalities throughout Chatham County. He stated he was extremely proud of the work that has been done, and we are moving in the right direction. Ald. Purtee stated he was going to keep pressing his thumb down because we have a lot more to do. He expressed how pushing for the pedestrian safety ordinance and the urban encampment ordinance were part of a systematic approach and not to pick on the homeless. Ald. Purtee stated that there is nothing that we are doing on this council that says anything about criminalizing homelessness, which is something that none of us wanted to do or want to do. He explained how the ordinances, such as the urban encampment policies, were about providing resources and having another tool in the tool belt, and providing what he calls responsibility and accountability for individuals.

Ald. Purtee stated he appreciated the Mayor's comment about getting resources on the southside. He stated he has seen a large influx of roofless individuals in that area, and in his District, he could attribute it to the fact that it is a main corridor surrounded by a lot of woods and vacant businesses for these folks to either hide or make camp. Ald. Purtee stated that one of the biggest reasons he was a big supporter of the \$19M investment into the homelessness initiative was that he thought that we could systematically and equitably approach this. He expressed that for many years on the southside, the biggest issue was infrastructure, roads, and drainage, but now the number one hot burning issue is homelessness. Ald. Purtee stated the challenge with moving forward with this is the behavioral health aspect--behavioral health and addiction issues. He stated that it is great that we are providing housing and other resources, but if we are not addressing or helping to partner and address those root causes, which are the addictive and mental health issues, then we are going to see the same folks. Ald. Purtee expressed that as we move forward, he wanted to see some equity spread out. He stated he has been asking for five, almost six, years now for a resource in that area and has asked for it to be in the budget and specifically put that in there for us to see that. Ald. Purtee explained that when you have a community that is hurting with an issue like this, it is one thing to have the processes and start somewhere. It is another thing to make bold decisions, and to figure out where we go from here. He stated we have to look beyond that and be bolder in that area by

saying if this is a burning issue we are having in the city right now, what else can we do and where are the missing pieces?

Mayor Johnson stated that equity was baked into our strategic plan. It is part of everything we do. He stated the day center was opening and it was done without any government money--it was all fundraised. Mayor Johnson stated that resourcing land is one thing, but you still have to have somebody to build a facility.

Ald. Purtee stated we have to really dig down into the conversation of focusing on all parts of the city. He stated there are cities out there that are very successful when they go in with a partner to purchase and rehab the property, like an old hotel/motel. They are putting transitional housing there for folks who are in need of services. Ald. Purtee stated that if the city has to share some of the responsibility to solve a community issue, then we should look at the upcoming budget and ask what can we do because it is a public safety issue, a public health issue, and a housing issue.

Ald. Palumbo stated he was glad that they were having this presentation, and he echoed the sentiments across the table that what he was hearing was to keep the foot on the gas. He stated he thought this was the most important infrastructure we have ever built. It is one of the best collaborative efforts that we have ever been a part of or done, and maybe it is the landmark between city and county and different agencies and providers (nonprofits, public, and private) pulling in relatively the same direction. Ald. Palumbo stated that we found something that is making a big difference, and now we are able to spread that around and do more. He commended all who are working on this, and commended Stephanie Kaple particularly for her work with providers in the trenches doing the point-in-time count all the way to the boardroom and in each situation. Ald. Palumbo also commended the council for continuing to make these investments and thanked the lineage of city managers that he has been able to serve with. Ald. Palumbo stated he had one question, which was "What is the McKinney-Vento Act?" Mayor Johnson and City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked the presenters for their presentations, and she stated that she mirrored the sentiments of her colleague, Ald. Purtee, regarding the southside. She also thanked Ald. Lanier for fighting for the ADU ordinance because it is actually helping to alleviate some of the homelessness in our community. Ald. Miller Blakely then posed a question regarding the day centers. She asked how much money we, as a City, are giving to our day centers, specifically to Come As You Are Ministries. (\$20,000 annually) Ald. Miller Blakely stated she knows that Come As You Are Ministries is struggling. She stated she would like to see us increase those grants, if possible. Ald. Miller Blakely further expressed that the Come As You Are Ministries provide phenomenal resources, but do not have the funding--they need more.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated there are people in the spaces on the medians, at the bus stops, and a group of people on the southside near CVS and Arby's. She asked if the homeless authority goes around to talk and engage with these people because they are there every single day. (Yes, they geolocate all of their outreach efforts so they can substantiate areas of the community that are in the highest need.) Ald. Miller Blakely suggested that the resource information be posted on the bus stops that have enclosures, letting the homeless individuals know that services are available. She also stated we need to communicate with our veteran services because they do a phenomenal job, but there are a lot of veterans out here who are homeless. We could connect them to the federal government, which has a program that will house them, but a lot of them do not know that this exists. Ald. Miller Blakely further mentioned Savannah State students who are experiencing homelessness as well. CEO and Executive Director Jennifer DuLong and City Manager Melder provided a response regarding the students. Ald. Miller Blakely also suggested partnering with Georgia Regional regarding mental health issues, in which Ms. DuLong advised that a doctor from Georgia Regional would be joining the Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless board. Ald. Miller Blakely asked for a hard copy of the list of the board of directors for the Interagency Council on Homelessness as well.

Ald. Leggett answered Ald. Miller Blakely's inquiry regarding posting information at bus stops. He then thanked the presenters for the work they are doing and continue to do. Ald. Leggett stated he knows it is not always painless, but he does appreciate what they are doing and the progress they are making. He further expressed how much he was impressed with the

collaborative approach. Ald. Leggett stated that you could not do as much as you do and be as effective as you are if you did not have the individuals who are supporting the effort and who are representing various governments, governmental agencies, the school board, and stakeholders. Ald. Leggett challenged everyone who advocates for the homeless to go out and spend a day or afternoon with them. He shared his experience of having a good time celebrating with the homeless New York Knicks fans the night before. Ald. Leggett stated that if you get an opportunity to go out and spend an afternoon or night out with some of the people, you would be amazed at the conversation you would get.

Ald. Lanier thanked all for the work they do and for putting this presentation together and bringing the council this information. She stated the part of the 1st District that is mostly impacted by this homelessness issue is the Greater Westside of Savannah. Ald. Lanier expressed that every meeting she has gone to on the westside (Brownville, Woodville, Cloverdale, and Hudson Hill) are mentioning/discussing homelessness issues. She stated that, based on the presentation, all of us should see a decrease, but she was seeing an increase. Ald. Lanier stated she was concerned about the increase and asked "Does that mean that the impoverished or the homeless are coming into the 1st District if the numbers are telling us homelessness should be down." She explained that there is a term called poverty dumping, and that is when you bring a population that is poorer than the population on the ground and insert them into that environment. Ald. Lanier stated we are very much against that, and that is why the Salvation Army project that they are proposing to be placed in the center of three historically underserved African-American communities is terrible planning. She exclaimed "Now what Family Promise does, and some other entities, is a good model for these neighborhoods because we could absorb that in the community and not impact the quality of life." Ald. Lanier stated we are moving in the right direction, but we have to be very thoughtful and intentional on the impact because we practice GPS, which keeps our citizens involved.

Ald. Wilder stated she thinks homelessness is not just a Savannah problem, but House Bill 295 made it so. She also mentioned House Bill 797 which states citizens could sue the city. Ald. Wilder expressed that when we say that we are doing all that we can, it's still not going to be enough. She stated we have heard Ms. DuLong and Union Mission talk, but the day centers, Come As You Are Ministries and Park Place Outreach, need to be in front of the council, telling us exactly what they are doing. She stated that we should see a return on our investments, and we should not have a day center that is right around the corner and see homeless people down the street in the same vicinity. Ald. Wilder expressed that when we say that we are doing a good job, she just wants us to do a better job. Ald. Wilder asked if the Continuum of Care members meet. (Yes) She also asked if people start suing us, where is that money going to come from? The City Manager Melder responded. Ald. Wilder also mentioned job preparedness by stating that when we walk around our districts, the people who are working are not people who live in Savannah. She stated we have to do something about getting our labor force ready. If we want to do something about homelessness and housing, we have to give people some more money and train them so that they can get these jobs.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that when the homeless camp was shut down, we began to experience an influx of homelessness throughout the six districts in the City of Savannah. She stated that Ald. Purtee gave a great dissertation, and she appreciated his comments. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz explained her practice of receiving information from constituents regarding the location of these homeless camps and relaying that information to the City Manager's office to make sure things are taken care of in reference to alleviating tents being set up in the back of our homes. She stated that the homeless citizens are in places where they do not have to be, and there are other places and resources that are available. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the presenters and the City Manager for bringing forward work that was not being done, and we are doing it. She said, "So, let us continue working with and providing services to those persons who are unhoused and destitute who are among us." Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz asked the public to continue to reach out to the council to let us know what they see so that the council can continue to serve this population of homeless.

[2. 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 and Ald. Miller Blakely moved to hold an executive session regarding litigation and real estate, seconded by Ald. Palumbo. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

At 1:00 p.m., Mayor Johnson recessed the work session for the executive session to be held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of City Hall in the City Attorney's library/conference room, which began at 1:15 p.m. All members were present, including the City Manager, City Attorney, and Clerk of Council.

No action was taken during executive session.

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

[3. City Manager Updates; As Needed](#)

No City Manager Update was held.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop and executive session at 1:52 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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