



**NOVEMBER 7, 2024 - 11:00 a.m. - WORKSHOP and CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING
CITY GOVERNMENT**

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

The work session and City Manager's briefing was held at **11:10 a.m.**, in the SCCPSS Board of Education Room located at the Eli Whitney Administrative Complex, 2 Laura Avenue, Building G. **Mayor Johnson** called the meeting to order, then recognized **Alderman Detric Leggett** 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

ABSENT:

Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

ALSO, PRESENT:

City Manager Jay Melder
Chief of Staff Daphanie Williams
City Attorney Bates Lovett
Clerk of Council Mark Massey
Assistant to Clerk of Council Renee Osborne

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Stormwater Infrastructure Needs and Funding Options Discussion](#)

[Stormwater Management Program Update 110724.pdf](#)

Stormwater Infrastructure Needs and Funding Options Discussion

The City Manager spoke to members of Council of the needs and options with the stormwater system and how we can achieve the necessary funding for improvements. He introduced the Water Resources Service Center with a presentation by the Stormwater Management Department: Chief of Water Resources Ron Feldner and Stormwater Management Director Zach Hoffman. They discussed issues related to the stormwater management system including Tropical Storm Debby; how flooding events are becoming more common, and how our ability to deal with these issues is related to maintenance and necessary capital improvements. Chief Feldner shared a video about the frequency of declared large disasters that we are seeing in this country. The total funding needed for the city's capital improvement projects is \$402.3M and to date we have secured \$157.2M or 39%.

Annual cap for programs and repairs is about \$2M/yr (90% funded). The City operates two pipe systems: water and sewer which have been paid for by the city but a 3rd pipe system for stormwater needs to be funded. The goal is to find a dedicated funding source/program that can be devoted to stormwater management. Revenue from a Stormwater Utilities user-based fee is another option that can be used to generate funding. There has been some success through the grant funding and partnerships. They are also developing a community outreach program to help engage the public in how stormwater services function.

Ald. Bell asked how the Stormwater Utilities Enterprise Fund will work. Chief Feldner explained that the stormwater fund would operate the same way that it does for water and sewer and have an independent enterprise fund to support it. Revenues from the fund would then support and be applied to the expenses of the Stormwater Management Program.

City Manager Melder stated that there are enterprise funds for other departments such as Sanitation, Parking Enterprise, and the Civic Center. The fees from these funds pay for the services that are provided by these departments as well as other monies such as taxes.

The Mayor added that this is a business and should function as a business. He said that we need to make a serious commitment and invest in the city's future. The past summer months of storms showed how significant our commitment needs to be.

Ald. Leggett expressed that after the flood event he saw more sand coming through cracks in the road and inquired as to the reason why that was happening (throughout the district). Service calls have been made to 311. He thanked them for their presentation.

Chief Prevatt stated he wondered if the water line was damaged and created a crack for the sand to come through. He also said that the flooding may have compromised the integrity of the asphalt. They will look into an inspection of the water line as well as the storm sewer line.

Ald. Lanier questioned the urban flooding and whether the paving materials make a difference in the deterioration/damage. It was explained that better materials are more expensive to use and has a maintenance aspect. Major rainfalls can overwhelm most systems but by adjusting costs it can make a big difference in the long run. Ald. Lanier also asked City Manager Melder the status on the flood plains and basin studies.

Zach Hoffman explained that they looked at a comprehensive stormwater management report to look at the individual major drainage basins in the city. Basins will be reviewed to determine certain rainfall events, where the flooding will occur and what improvements can be made. They have currently remodelled 10 of 24 basins thus far. Chief Prevatt added that the majority of the city system study has been completed and that they are now working on outlying areas and working towards the southside.

Ald. Lanier wanted to know how we measure the cost of the runoff. It is based upon the amount of impervious (unaffected) area you have on your property - the more area you have, the more fees you are likely to pay. The fee could be based upon a higher single family residence cost or it can be done through a reduced fee.

City Manager Melder suggested looking at the example in the handout to review the amount of billing units per type of property.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan thanked the Chief and Zach for the presentation. She stated that the administration wants to leave a legacy and offer solutions for future residents by showing that we know how to get things done. She also referenced the Stormwater presentation and expressed concerns about a crack in the structure, the safety of the people entering the drains, and when the last check/inspection had been done.

Ald. Palumbo thanked the team for the presentation and praised them for articulating the issues and the needs. He felt that the proposal was reasonable and expressed appreciation for how much of the funding has already been accumulated. He stated that we have been very lucky to not have had major catastrophies or a direct hit in the city from a tropical storm or hurricane as they have had in other areas. He expressed the importance of articulating this to the public, the need to be able to generate direct dollars, and match grant funding. He is in full support of an enterprise fund and a proposal for the Council to be able to implement a Stormwater Utility for the city.

The Mayor stated that this a 2 step process: 1. Create the utility and 2. Figure out how to fund it. He referenced the Atlanta sewer situation which remained unresolved until it became untenable. He is committed to not allowing that to happen here in Savannah by managing the financial output incrementally. He further stated that ultimately we will have to find a mechanism within our government to address this situation (innovative and proactive ways and using a public citizen fee schedule).

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that we have an aging infrastructure and it is this administration's job to do something about it. She mentioned over the years we have used a variety of funding

sources but we need another method - this proposal has her support. She also asked Chief Prevatt for clarification on the acronyms used. He stated that going forward they would put the acronyms at the beginning of the PowerPoint so that they can be referenced more easily. For example, SWMP (Stormwater Management Program), GEFA (Georgia Environmental Finance Authority), SWU (Stormwater Utility), etc. She was also very pleased with the Savannah Capital Improvements Drainage Project map that they provided because it shows equity. She also thanked them for the information regarding the Southside (Ald. Purtee's District) and for using them as a model.

Ald. Miller Blakely shared that she does not believe in taxing the people but in this instance she agrees that this would be the best course of action to support the Stormwater Utility Project. She referenced the Garden City Stormwater customer billing sheet and asked if we would be using that as a template to charge our residents and our businesses, or another alternative. For the public's ears, she stated that \$4.75 per month for a single family residential unit, additionally with their water bill, is a reasonable rate for city residents.

City Manager Melder stated that we are in the midst of the feasibility study but that most likely would use the template from Garden City. Council would be consulted on the service need and what we currently pay through the general fund or SPLOST dollars (the right rate for us).

The Mayor's decision points regarding stormwater are: do nothing, request that the city manager create the fund, and direct him to return to Council with some options about how it could be funded.

Ald. Bell also suggested that keeping the public informed by having some sessions with them about the process.

[2. Legislative Agenda Discussion](#)

[2025 State Legislative Agenda Workshop 110724.pdf](#)

Legislative Agenda Discussion

The Mayor stated that we have a "wish list" of items that we want them to be able to work on. In addition, he commented that we have seen some relative success in some things that we have tried to do and that is due to the work of Joe Shearouse and our lobbyists. He introduced Joe Shearouse and thanked him for all his work.

Joe Shearouse, Acting Chief of Information and Public Affairs - presentation

Purpose: provide an update on the next steps for the formulation of the City Council's 2025 Legislative Agenda (City Council Input and Feedback).

Mr. Shearouse stated that the legislative cycle is an annual one with a variety of committee meetings and bill reviews. A majority of time is spent on Home Rule Protection (protection of the authority of local government). There have also been some other major accomplishments in the past few years such as: Hotel/Motel Tax, City Council Term Limits, and the Community Improvement District. There are specific legislative priorities such as impact fees and ways to weigh the fees for affordable housing. In addition, we are also reviewing a variety of housing initiatives that can add tools to our "toolbox", in order to provide more housing for our residents. Also under consideration is a review of new laws that have passed for Recorder's Court, as well as new and creative ways to use our SPLOST dollars.

Mr. Shearouse discussed support of public infrastructure projects such as water and sewer to aid in the equitable growth and resiliency of our region, low-income tax credits, and policies that align with the 100% Clean Energy Resolution.

Mayor Johnson thanked Joe Shearouse, City Manager Melder, and the City Attorney and appreciated them being ready to address those things.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan thanked Mr. Shearouse and asked that he keep an eye on Senate Bill #51 (bill to exempt the sales and use taxes on menstrual products). She stated that it would help women in our state and other states. Georgia could become the 29th state to not tax personal care items.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz asked about school aged children and compulsory education. Mayor Johnson added that although we currently have compulsory education in Georgia where children can go to school until age 16, they can decide that they want to stop attending school after that age. He further stated that when children are not forced to go to school it can create issues for the city because they are uneducated and on the streets. Municipalities and school systems have shifted away from pushing compulsory education and he feels that the City cannot be the driving force. The issue has stalled.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked Mr. Shearouse for the presentation. She asked him to explain under *Specific Legislative Priorities, item #3, Amend the definition of blighted property, to include*

abandoned structures, lots, parcels or properties to assist in redevelopment efforts.

Mr. Shearouse explained that under the eminent domain law the housing team acquires certain properties that they sell back (sometimes in better condition). Those properties must meet certain criteria in order to be redeveloped. However, there have been times when the property is absent of a structure (maybe due to collapse or fire), and that is when the eminent domain tool is used to remove it from being blighted or downtrodden, and continue with redevelopment efforts.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked him to explain *Under Consideration & Review, Support the increase of Recorders Court Technology Fee*. Mr. Shearouse stated that the fee has been \$10.00 since 2003 and is under review. The purpose of the fee is to make the courts more accessible and easier for the public. For example, a virtual court option for those without transportation or who may be out of town. The current plan is to do additional research to understand its impact on the community.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked about item #4, *Under Consideration & Review: Support a Constitutional Amendment...or supported rent and income restricted housing*.

Mr. Shearouse stated that there has been large property growth in our area and other areas in Savannah which would allow us to freeze property rates for the property owner in exchange for them to freeze the rental rates. He said that this item will be challenging and require a constitutional amendment.

City Manager Melder stated that it had been on this council's agenda and a prior council's agenda. Ald. Miller Blakely asked about item #5, *Allow local governments to sell unclaimed confiscated weapons at auction or have them destroyed*. The Mayor responded by saying that we have had guns that have remained unclaimed for years and now we have to decide what to do with them. We do not want to have these guns be sold again and potentially be put back out on the streets. Ald. Miller Blakey shared her concern especially regarding the word sell. At this time State law does not give us the option to decide whether to sell or destroy.

City Manager Melder said that going forward we would make sure that our intent is evident in our legislative agenda wording.

The Mayor adjourned the meeting to prepare for the Show Cause Hearing.

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

[4. City Manager's Agenda Review](#)

There was no action taken during the Workshop or Executive Session.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop/executive session at **12:33 p.m.**

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://savannahgovtv.viebit.com/player.php?hash=BlhqwiVadzGpN5w>