



AUGUST 28, 2025 - 12:00 p.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 **12:02 p.m.** in the 2nd Floor Media Room. Mayor Johnson called the meeting to order, then recognized Alderman Kurtis Purtee to offer a prayer. Ald. Leggett asked Mayor Johnson to remember the people of Minneapolis who were recently impacted by the tragedy/shooting.

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
Clerk of Council Mark Massey
Deputy Clerk of Council Gwendolyn Jones

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Vision Zero Update](#)

Presented by City Manager Melder, Chief of Planning & Economic Development Faye DiMassimo, Senior Director of Transportation Stephen Henry, Transportation/Vision Zero Coordinator Harold Taylor, Jr., and Police Captain Bradley Beddow.

Chief DiMassimo provided a brief overview of the presentation. Mr. Henry introduced Mr. Harold Taylor, who is leading this initiative. Mr. Taylor presented the updates and progress of the Vision Zero initiative. Captain Bradley Beddow of the Savannah Police Department presented the collision data in correlation to the initiative.

Following the presentation, the City Council participated in discussions and asked questions.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the City Manager, Chief DiMassimo, Senior Director Stephen Henry, Mr. Harold Taylor, and Captain Beddow for the presentation. She stated the residents, council, and our mayor are so appreciative of the work. The collective circle and working together are changing the way traffic calming and Vision Zero are going on in our city.

Alderman Leggett asked where are we now with the sinkholes that are popping up in the city? He stated the reason why he asked is because we cannot actually have an effective Vision Zero unless we start talking about the streets and how they are cracking. The City Manager provided a response regarding the cave-ins occurring throughout the city. Referring to the presentation, Alderman Leggett asked Mr. Taylor if we have any tentative locations that are able to be on that slide because he sees a couple of places that are missing--Park Avenue between Atlantic and Paulson is missing, and a couple of other places that the residents have sent in a request. Mr. Taylor advised that the traffic calming portal is steadily changing, and the data may be forthcoming as they collect data. Alderman Leggett stated that when we got started in 2019-2020, we were asking about the traffic calming devices, and we had a problem with the supply chain. Alderman Leggett asked if we are up to par now? (Yes) He also asked Mr. Taylor, from his assessment, if the process has become more streamlined and if it is better for the residents and the public to put in for traffic calming devices. (Yes) Ald. Leggett asked Mayor Johnson and City Manager Melder if it was possible for us to take a tour through our neighborhood associations, with Mr. Taylor and Chief DiMassimo's team, to help the residents realize a better streamlined process. (Yes)

Ald. Purtee stated that he was quite impressed with what he saw. He expressed that he knows there is still some work to do, but thinks we are moving in the right direction. Ald. Purtee stated that he is glad there is a citizen-driven approach that allows citizens and community members to take ownership of this process. He asked, when a person submits an assessment, how long does that take before we take some sort of action behind it? Mr. Taylor replied by explaining the steps of the process. Ald. Purtee stated the traffic calming process is a shared responsibility between devices, enforcement, and the design of the roadway. Where we cannot have the devices, we need more enforcement. Where we can, we should be able to design a roadway or a street in a manner that allows for safe pedestrian crossing and the flow of traffic, but, at the same time, safe speeds. Ald. Purtee stated that what he noticed lately with traffic calming is that we have a lot more speeders on the roads. And it seemed to him that with the growth and the development in our area, we are seeing a lot more traffic and cars on the roadway. He stated we need more traffic officers, or we need to give our officers the tools to be able to handle that (speeding) when they are not responding to calls. Ald. Purtee expressed that when people speed in the area, they do not stop for police because they know they can. One of our neighboring jurisdictions was able to purchase a device (called the grappler) to slow vehicles down or stop a pursuit immediately. Ald. Purtee stated that we need to be a little creative in order to help our folks to be able to do that (enforce) and keep our streets safer. He asked if we could look into the grappler. (Yes) He also asked for a monthly traffic calming report that will go out to all city council members so that the council is aware of what has been installed, what is coming, and what is on the horizon in areas that may have been of concern. (Yes)

Mayor Johnson stated that nothing changes behavior like a traffic ticket, and to that end, law enforcement officers have to make a judgment call about what is the most important thing at that moment. We trust them with that ability, but we also have resources coming here--the Georgia State Patrol loves being here. Mayor Johnson further stated that the Sheriff's Department has significantly upgraded their traffic enforcement interdiction unit, the Road Runner Strike team, which he thinks helps us. He expressed that he agrees with Ald. Purtee, and said it depends on how far you want to go into that, because we want to stop, and we do not want to chase. But then again, we want to make sure that people remain safe because there is a legal responsibility we take on when we do that. Mayor Johnson stated he hoped that

we would have created a baseline to get to one day--around every school and every park in our city there should be traffic calming devices. He said that we know where kids congregate and where they hang out, and he hoped that we could get beyond the other stuff and that people just know that you cannot speed around a park and in the vicinity of a school. City Manager Melder stated that this is something we are working on for the 2026 budget and are working to include the initiative in Savannah GPS. Mayor Johnson stated that another issue dealing with sinkholes is that they have become much prevalent around the country. He explained that the weather conditions and the amount of rain that the ground has been taking in are shifting a whole bunch of stuff. Mayor Johnson stated that he did not know whether there was anything out in the technological world that could randomly test the stability of the ground underneath--that would predictably state that this ground has shifted, this ground is weak, or the stability of this ground is questionable, so that we might be able to predict those (sinkholes) before they happen. City Manager Melder stated that they are aware of some features and are looking into those pretty aggressively.

Ald. Palumbo stated he wanted to echo the sentiments of the table of a remarkable and very thoughtful presentation--the presentation itself, the graphic design, and the testimonials going above and beyond to share those stories. He further stated that what it's all about is making residents happy and keeping them safe, and it is encouraging to see the affirmation that the investments are working to save lives. Ald. Palumbo stated that this brings on the new challenge as he believed that you (the Vision Zero initiative) are ready to have more resources to be able to do more, and it is going to get more difficult as time goes along because it is so comprehensive and can be expensive. Ald. Palumbo stated he would like to see more citywide, keeping the momentum, and getting more people involved. He further stated that for the next update next year, that we begin to integrate things like crosswalk expansions and crosswalk counts, marry together the sidewalk expansions we have had or new construction where that has been implemented to see what kind of difference it is making in the data, and try to get more on the supply side of mobility. Ald. Palumbo stated that he knows we have big-ticket items headed up for SPLOST for mobility improvements, bike lanes, sidewalk infrastructure, and much more, and being able to measure the difference that it makes in saving lives is an important test case for 2025 and well into the future. He added that he loved to see the recognition that lighting and visibility are important, and stated he thinks the temporary traffic calming measures that we have in the city right now (new construction, drainage implements, and street closures) are working in our favor.

Ald. Bell stated she was curious as to whether or not a certain percentage of neighbors/residents in a block is required to sign on or to agree to install even a temporary device. Mr. Taylor explained how temporary devices are used in the process. He stated there is a certain percentage we have to meet--before we move to permanence, 50% plus one of the residents, who are impacted by a particular device, have to agree. Ald. Bell stated that during the early days of traffic calming devices she knew there were moments when even a temporary device was installed, and the neighbors/residents found that they were inconvenienced and wanted it removed. She asked Mr. Taylor do we experience much of that now. (No appeals, but opposition to placement)

Mayor Johnson stated to the City Manager that this is a great opportunity to start. We talked about dashboarding, and the information is right there. He stated that, in addition to the report sent to council, this is something to easily have a Vision Zero page. The City Manager explained that the map that was shared to council for the first time was in beta form, but when it is set to go live a month from now, it will open to the public and will include information and data statistics. Mayor Johnson stated that just the investments since 2022 are pretty significant, so he wanted to make sure the information is out there.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan requested the fire department be included in the initiative because a lot of the people who want traffic calming live basically on or are connected to arterial streets--so that is a "no" for them. She further asked if people are informed before going through the application process, or if you let them go through the whole process and then tell them it was because of this reason. Mr. Taylor stated that if they do live on a major arterial collector roadway, they will let the applicant know immediately upon completing their staff report. So, within a week or two, they know if that street initially qualifies. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that the other piece to the

application process is a money thing. If it is not in the budget, then they are not going to get that processed. She asked, do you initiate that process anyway and what is the gap between the application and the implementation? Mr. Taylor explained he does not have much restriction when it comes to the budget as far as getting traffic calming devices placed in our neighborhoods, because that is a priority for us. Ald. Wilder-Bryan further asked if the people are being informed that, depending on the budget, we can not ensure them when they are going to get it (the traffic calming device), whether it be two years, three years, or whatever. (Yes, the process can take upwards of a year to start seeing progression, even though the steps are streamlined.) Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked what the strategy is, after the implementation of the device, in combating traffic that is regulated to streets on either side. Mr. Taylor explained that they are getting back into the neighborhood plan approach based on what the data shows them. Ald. Wilder-Bryan also asked if it is harder to get approval for a camera system like the school zone cameras from the state legislature as opposed putting the traffic calming in. City Manager Melder responded by stating that the state only allows speed cameras in school zones. Ald. Wilder-Bryan followed up by asking if we could petition for that? (Yes)

Ald. Miller Blakely stated she was very pleased to know that there were only five (5) fatalities from this year. She asked where those fatalities were located. (Captain Beddow replied.) In response to lighting improvements, Ald. Miller Blakely stated Mr. Harold mentioned MLK and East Broad street, and her concern was more southside and eastside in the neighborhoods. She asked what do we have scheduled for those areas. City Manager Melder explained that the city is in the final stages of working with Georgia Power to start up a Light Up Savannah initiative.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked how long he has been speaking with Georgia Power, how long this process will take, and where those locations would be. (City Manager Melder responded.) She stated she was concerned as we do a lot of traffic calming and lighting up the city, but it is not in certain areas. Ald. Miller Blakely expressed that she would like to begin to see traffic calming and lighting in those areas.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated she also would like to thank the advisory committee members who are working with them externally, along with our internal committee. She stated that traffic calming has gone from a small amount to having this whole department working with us, and our constituents are very pleased with what they are seeing. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated she also wanted to thank our Traffic Calming Committee, who worked really hard with the city and listened to concerns that came to the Transportation Department. She also posed a question by asking how we change the behavior as we change the speed signs, lowering the speed limit--a question we do not have to answer right now.

Ald. Lanier stated that the presentation mentioned equity, and she understands it is a process, and we are working on that. She noted that we have not achieved equity, but we have achieved some equality, and that every district has traffic calming. Ald. Lanier further stated that if we start talking about how much, then we will start looking at the equity numbers, so let's gauge that. She stated she is hearing a lot of requests and complaints from Tremont Hill, Woodville, Hudson Hill, and West Savannah. These requests have been made since 2020, and we have not addressed them. Ald. Lanier stated we need to look in those areas and try to achieve some equity there. She also stated that if the process changed and it is working for other people now, let's make sure these people, who have been trying to get something done for the past five years, get the latest information. Ald. Lanier also expressed her concern about the beacon light on West Bay Street. She stated we are installing a light (traffic light on Louisville Road) anticipating high pedestrain and truck traffic, but we have people getting killed in what was one of the highest corridors in the state. We asked for a light, but could not get one. She further stated the preference is still for a traffic light at that corner because the beacon light is trying to force people towards the stores, and not everyone is going to the stores; they just want to cross the street at the corner to go wherever they are going--it is a high foot traffic area. Ald. Lanier stated she knows everyone knows about the huge problem on West Boundary Road near Garrison School. She noted that it is a problem connected with the school when they take in and take out, but it is still a problem when you have parents sitting in the lane of traffic, blocking traffic for 45 minutes to an hour--everything just stops. Mr. Taylor stated he would work in conjunction with the school system. Based on the presentation mentioning lighting improvements at Liberty and East Broad, Ald. Lanier asked if that was one of the high-crash

areas. (Yes) She stated her observation is that a lot of the downtown pedestrian traffic, whether it is tourists or students, behavior has changed. Ald. Lanier suggested that maybe the education piece could extend to the tourists, students, or people who frequent downtown. Chief DiMassimo stated that they talked about adding an education piece to the Vision Zero plan that is around behavioral issues.

[2. Executive Session for Real Estate, Personnel and Litigation](#)

There was no executive session held.

[3. City Manager Updates](#)

There was no City Manager's update.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop at 1:31 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://www.youtube.com/@cityofsavannah/videos>

