



**FEBRUARY 26, 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 **11:05 a.m.**, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Media Room. Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, 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

**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. Public Safety Update Continued](#)

[2026 Public Safety Presentation Address Violence Among Youth.pdf](#)

\* A special introduction of the recently appointed Chief of Community Services, Ashley Reynolds-Marshall, was made by City Manager Melder.

City Manager Melder stated that we were going to continue with our public safety update for two non police and fire agencies that are involved in this work. He then introduced Recreation and Leisure Services Director Nick Roberts and ONSE (Neighborhood Safety and Engagement) Director Jimmie Johnson to present their presentations.

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

Ald. Purtee stated that when you start talking about engaging these young individuals, this program is highly successful, and he loves it. He stated that you are not going to police your way out of gun violence in a community--it is just not the way it works. Ald. Purtee states that this is a holistic approach, and it takes community partners, different organizations, and successful programs like this.

Ald. Purtee mentioned that the Savannah Chatham County Public Schools System's slogan is "attendance matters." He stated that he thinks ONES partnering with the attendance matters initiative would be a very successful outcome. Ald. Purtee stated that another question he had regarding the ONES office was how many people or employees does the ONES office have? (Seven) Ald. Purtee stated that they need more. He stated that in order to get this much work done for even 15 or 36,000 individuals, it is going to take a lot more bodies. We want to make sure our staffing numbers are good. Ald. Purtee stated he loves the neighborhood interactions that the ONES office does, and getting out where all these kids are and being able to actively engage is hard to do throughout the city with just five people. He asked the City Manager, Director Johnson, and Director Roberts, what is the biggest challenge you are seeing to make these programs reach their full potential and actually benefit the community. Each provided a response.

Ald. Palumbo stated he appreciated the youth engagement, the drive, and its intersection, and how in this big ecosystem that we have in the city of Savannah, they all intersect and collide. He stated that there has been a great growth in diversity of programming and the offerings in Recreation Re-imagined. Ald. Palumbo stated that the engagement for registered participants is growing and growing, and asked if it was across the board for all the programs. He also asked if there were any activities that are going to outstrip our own capacity to serve, and if we need to make investments in the future. Ald. Palumbo further stated he knows Mr. Roberts has been working on a lot of technological programming, esports, and some of those, and asked what investments in the years ahead we need to make. Director Roberts responded.

Ald. Bell thanked Director Roberts and Director Johnson for the work that they do. She stated she recognized how important it is for us to do as much as we can on the prevention side. Ald. Bell asked Director Roberts and Director Johnson if we are proactive or if we wait for the kids to register for the programs. She stated that she suspected Director Johnson was working with the police department to determine areas where they needed to attract kids for various reasons, and assumed that the answer to that question was yes.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated she was pleased with the work the ONES and the Recreation & Leisure Services departments are doing with our children and saving our children. She mentioned how the ONES office does not take their hands off of the incarcerated ones by continuing to help guide them to get their GEDs and things of that nature. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that when we are doing this type of work, we are doing great work.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that at the opening of the 100 Days of Summer, she sat there in amazement when she saw all the children at the pool, with the majority of them being outfitted in lifeguard uniforms, and we are paying these young people. She expressed that for years and years, they talked about not having lifeguards, which was the reason why our pools were not being opened.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that in the two months into our 2026 budget, the citizens in the 3rd District get to see a return on their investment. She expressed her thanks for the revitalization of Sunset Park and for the splash pads. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated she would want cameras in the parks because of the dumping and vandalism. She stated that we have to be more vigilant.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked Director Johnson if he could tell her why the other schools are not listed (on the PowerPoint presentation) because she has two other high schools in her District. Director Johnson explained that they have increased (the number of schools) to 11, so now they have added Jenkins High School, Myers Middle School, Mercer Middle School, Savannah High School, Windsor Forest High School, and Hubert Middle School.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked about the need for additional space for the ONES office. She stated that she is at the PARC all the time, and on the second floor, there are spaces that are not being utilized. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated she was hoping that we could get some synergy and maybe let one of the people from the ONES staff (utilize the space), especially when they are getting out of school. She stated we got the space, but the buildings mean nothing if we do not have the programs to match what we have going on in these communities. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that she just wants to be proactive.

Ald. Leggett expressed his appreciation for the opportunity for the youth coaches to meet with Recreation & Leisure Services. He stated that he was looking forward to the conversation, and asked if they could speak about our involvement in the community centers and the programming that is happening in the community centers. Ald. Leggett also mentioned that the WW Law Center was not inviting, and the conversation about upgrading the lighting around the entire facility and making sure that the security is right.

Ald. Leggett stated that at the Delaware Center, we have seniors who depend on the staff. The staff helps seniors with getting on social media, paying their bills online, and with certain services that come out of our community centers. Ald. Leggett stated that, for some reason, we are starting to shift our employees around, and that is causing a hardship on them mentally.

Ald. Leggett stated that he has always been a stickler for the ONES program because they are the most important key to the relationship of our young people and transitioning from elementary, middle school, up to high school. He stated that he thinks it is best that the ONES program tell their story when SGTV is actually launched, and they will be able to tell all the stuff that the ONES program is doing. Ald. Leggett stated that these are our young people, and this is our target goal of what we need to do in the next year, and how our partners are playing a pivotal role in making sure our young people are safe. He then asked Director Johnson if ONES has a working relationship with the Housing Authority. Director Johnson replied.

Ald. Leggett asked what happened to all of the Eastside Concerned Citizens' memorabilia that was thrown in the dumpster. He stated that he needed that information because this historic information is what really built the neighborhood. It has a lot of information that is vital for our seniors and their families. Assistant City Manager Young stated that staff provided the records to the City of Savannah's Municipal Archives. Ald. Leggett expressed that as sensitive as those items were, he thinks that a conversation with the Alderman of that District, the At-Large, or the Mayor would have been a good conversation to have because Freddy Patrick was a staple in that community for the work he did.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked Director Roberts about the type of programs that are offered in the community centers. She stated that her main concern was the after-school kids' cafe, and asked if they still do that in the community centers. Ald. Miller Blakely asked if so, how are they getting the food, and is there a budget for the food? Director Roberts stated that the program is in partnership with Second Harvest, and there is no cost to the city. He stated that the only requirement is that we have a sustained number of youth that we are able to serve.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked if there is a budget for repairing the community centers. She stated she is concerned about the Tompkins Community Center-- there was a wall that had been damaged for six months. Ald. Miller Blakely asked how long it takes to repair something like that. Director Roberts explained.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated that she has visited quite a few of our community centers. She stated she has seen a lot of computers, but has not seen anybody giving instructions. Ald. Miller Blakely asked if we could get somebody to actually teach our children how to do computer work, how to do AI, etc. (Yes) Ald. Miller Blakely stated that we need to add more funds so that we can hire more people to be in the community centers.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated that with our ONES program, she sees that they serve ages 12 through 25, and then asked the following questions:

- For the people who are 18 to 25, what programs/services does ONES have for those individuals?
- Do you take our participants to other locations aside from Savannah?

- Are they exposed to other areas in the country? Ald. Miller Blakely stated she is more concerned with our young people being exposed outside of Savannah.
- Do ONES communicate with our retired police officers, and is it a possibility to bring them in as mentors for the ONES program?

Ald. Lanier asked if there was a home for PALS. (Yes) She stated that we had a conversation with the Housing Authority director about the gym, but it is being used for storage in an area that is so much needed for what it was intended for. And the question came, would they sell it to the city for a dollar? Ald. Lanier stated that they are going to look at that option.

Ald. Lanier stated that Ald. Purtee had some really good statistics on the number of children in school. She asked him for the number for those who were between the ages of 19 and 25. (approx. 15, 000). Ald. Lanier stated that these are the children that the leadership on the westside was looking at, but we made the recommendation for the Fell Street Trade Center, and were told no. She further stated she was surprised that Groves (High School) was not on the ONES list. Director Johnson responded. Ald. Lanier further stated that in the ONES' mission it says that the justice system is one of the partners, and asked how you interact with them and what that looks like. Director Johnson explained.

Mayor Johnson stated that he would hope that we would look at the mindset that ONES is different from SIP and PALS because he looks at SIP and PALS as being like net fishing. We could cast very wide nets and engage young people, but ONES is like line fishing--you are looking for a particular fish. Mayor Johnson stated that when we engage them we also know they have siblings that if we do not do something significant with them then their siblings are going to follow in the same path.

Mayor Johnson stated that collaboration is important. He expressed that everybody has mentoring programs, and he wished to create a way, as we did with homeless organizations, a continuum of care, so that we are not overserving or kids are not dropping through cracks. Mayor Johnson stated that hospital intervention is another opportunity for us to engage parents and engage children. He stated that it is much more incidental now, but he would really like to see a lot more of that.

Mayor Johnson stated that the young people are different; things are different from what they used to be. He stated that we have to be much more innovative in the things that we do and the way that we look. Mayor Johnson stated that he thinks we have to leverage technology and gaming. He stated that if you have gaming, they will come. If you leverage music, they will come. Mayor Johnson stated "So then, let us teach them how to do it." He stated he would like to see our first music studio, where we actually teach people the real business, teaching them how to really create videos and content, and those types of things.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan expressed her concerns about the non-profits that receive money from the city. She stated that every year we have a budget for people who are requesting money and we give it to them, but not one of them has ever come in front of us to tell us exactly what they are doing.

## [2. Community Benefits Discussion](#)

[2026 Community Benefits Presentation CBAs, Benefit Ordinances.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder stated that this is not a proposal. This is a policy discussion that we need the Council to have. He stated that community benefit agreements and a community benefit ordinance were something that the Council formally last talked about in 2020 as a tandem component to the Canal District Plan. City Manager Melder provided a brief overview, and then turned it over to Planning and Urban Design Senior Director Bridget Lidy to help walk through some of the information.

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

Ald. Bell asked City Attorney Lovett how this is legal with the nationwide attack on DEI. City Attorney Lovett replied. Ald. Bell stated that she knows the policies are for everybody, but there are certain components of the policy that would benefit various ethnicities.

Mayor Johnson stated that he thinks there is a lot to digest, and we can create some time to engage with the City Manager to give him feedback. He stated that feedback is important because if he does not have feedback, he (the City Manager) has to go along with what he thinks we meant. Mayor Johnson asked the City Manager to make the feedback as one of his agenda items for their individual meetings. He stated that he thinks the Council needs to come back and have a discussion, and then the City Manager can come back and say what he thinks he heard.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that in the six years that she has been here, the Council has been doing all of those bullet points. She stated that there are some agreements that are already in place, and she does not know anybody on the Council who is not doing all of those things. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that every time she signs or votes for something, it is always going to be the choice that the majority of the people in the community want and an agreement she has been able to negotiate because that is what she thought we were supposed to do.

Mayor Johnson stated the goal with that is the challenge to institutionalize it, so it becomes a part of the city's DNA. When you look beyond the people sitting in these seats, we are doing it because this is the city's DNA.

Ald. Palumbo stated that there was a request for the table and a request for staff. He stated he thinks there have been great community benefit agreements negotiated in individual districts, but if you have a great example of something that worked for you, he would love to see it and then find a way to get the process behind it.

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

There was no Executive Session held.

[4. City Manager Updates](#)

There was no City Manager's update held.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop upon conclusion of the executive session at 1:22 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>

