



JULY 09, 2026 - 3:30 p.m. - WORKSHOP and CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING

CITY GOVERNMENT

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

In open session upon conclusion of a closed executive session regarding litigation, the work session was held at **4:35 p.m.**, in the 2nd Floor Media Room.

PRESENT:

Mayor Van R. Johnson, II
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, 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. Capital Projects Update](#)

[1. Capital Projects Update.pdf](#)

Mayor Johnson thanked City Manager Melder, members of the Council, and Team Savannah for what he called our march through equity throughout our city. He stated we will continue to make sure all neighborhoods and areas of the town have access to state-of-the-art facilities. Mayor Johnson mentioned the groundbreaking of the first community center and gym in the 6th District and the gym at PARC in the 3rd District. He also mentioned the completion of the

Tide to Town trail in the 4th District. Mayor Johnson stated he wanted to set the table for the City Manager by saying that "what people saw was the continuation and the culmination of work that takes years to get where you are." He stated that for the ribbons we get to cut and for the ground we get to break, it represents the work of hundreds of city employees, all doing their profession, all at the top of their game, getting it done. Mayor Johnson acknowledged that many of the employees were in the room, and then stated he wanted to give them all a round of applause. Mayor Johnson said, "We all play our roles, we all do our parts, and at the end of the day, Savannah is where we live and where we serve. We serve hard." Mayor Johnson then turned it over to the City Manager and his team.

City Manager Melder, Real Estate Services Senior Director Cristy Lawrence, Chief Operating Officer Saesha Carlile, Planning & Economic Development Chief Faye DiMassimo, Stormwater Management Senior Director Zach Hoffman, Water Resources Administrator Anthony Caston, and Transportation Services Senior Director Stephen Henry presented the Capital Projects Update.

During the presentation, members of City Council discussed and asked questions.

Mayor Johnson asked if this information was publicly facing, where the public gets to see this in real time. He stated it should not be a secret. City Manager Melder responded. In regard to the Springfield Terrace School aka Pearl Lee Smith School, Mayor Johnson asked what the \$50,000 grant was. Sr. Director Lawrence stated the grant was a National Service grant. Mayor Johnson stated there was additional money because somebody pledged money towards that particular project, and he was trying to remember what it was. He stated, "Let's talk about that because that might be something we can use for whatever enhancement the community might want."

Ald. Leggett asked about the money allocated for the Springfield Terrace School. City Manager Melder stated that the Council appropriated and allocated the \$3M from the hotel motel tax resolution for this project in the last budget where we specifically talked about the museum piece.

Ald. Lanier stated she had a question about the fairground project. She asked if the developer was the original developer on this P3 arrangement. (Yes) Ald. Lanier also asked about the project cost of \$30M for the River Street enhancements project. City Manager Melder explained.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked if the \$9.3M for the waterworks building was just for the stabilization. (Correct) She then asked what the total amount for that property was. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Wilder asked for clarification regarding the capital projects that are going on with stormwater. She asked if most of these projects would be funded by SLOST 7. City Manager Melder explained. Ald. Wilder stated she wanted to be clear about the VIP priority capital projects. She stated she wanted to make sure that the people in the 3rd District are represented by the person who went hard for the stormwater.

Ald. Leggett asked if the Gwinnett Street improvement would help the Henry Street flooding issue. He further stated that he knows about the Waters Avenue and Harmon Street pipelining, and then asked if those pipelinings would help with the flooding on Henry Street. (Yes, it will absolutely help.) Ald. Leggett noted a lot of work has been done on Henry Street, all the way to Paulsen Street. He asked if those (improvements) were tied into our Casey Canal investment and if the water would be pulled off from that side across Waters Avenue. (Correct)

Ald. Miller Blakely asked when the project on 54th, 56th, and 57th would be completed. Sr. Director Hoffman stated they are completing the section on Reynolds Avenue right now, then will be moving to the last block on Abercorn. The project is scheduled to be completed by December. In regard to the Supervisory Control & Data Acquisition (SCADA) Upgrade, Ald. Miller Blakely asked if the construction management (Garney) went with the original contract for the I & D Plant or was it something separate. Mr. Caston stated that yes, we are working with them, but we will be working with all of our other contractors and vendors when we put SCADA in our stormwater and wastewater systems.

Ald. Lanier asked if we were using any AI. Mr. Caston responded.

Mayor Johnson stated that we need to have at least the framework of an AI policy of some acceptable use. He stated we should be able to put together a multi-jurisdictional group of folks to kind of build it because, if not, we will find ourselves running behind it. Mayor Johnson stated he does not want that to occur. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Palumbo asked about the neighborhood flyers that were presented to the council members. He stated that he was going to ask every city staff person who delivers a presentation "Was this AI-generated?" Ald. Palumbo stated that for any implementation (of an AI policy), it's worth its own workshop, and Council certainly deserves to discuss this thoroughly about how we implement it and how we choose to do it with pride as Team Savannah. He further expressed that he understood the speed and efficiency of using AI, but if we are going to do something with pride and it is going to touch every household, we need to make sure that we are doing our best.

Ald. Wilder asked about the water, sewer, and stormwater neighborhood projects that were listed in the presentation. She stated she would like to see more projects in the 3rd District. Mr. Caston responded.

Ald. Miller Blakely expressed her concerns regarding the Uncle Fill Pothole Patrol Program. She stated that we are a beautiful city, but we have an issue with potholes, especially in neighborhoods/subdivisions. Ald. Miller Blakely stated that we might need to look into getting another machine so that we can fill these potholes. She also asked how we determine which streets get resurfaced. City Manager Melder responded.

Mayor Johnson stated that we have a lot of roads and they are very busy roads. He expressed that we have to make sure people know we have a way of addressing potholes more aggressively, and as soon as we know about them, we are able to address them.

Ald. Wilder thanked Mr. Henry for the potholes that were filled in her District--a total of 66. She stated she thought it was a good average for one truck.

Ald. Lanier mentioned the drainage at Louisville and West Boundary. She stated she knows that the work is being done at the canal where the dormitories are and asked if that work was connected (to the canal improvements). (Yes) Ald. Lanier asked that while we conduct that work, will it interfere with the road or will we be required to do any road work right there. City Manager Melder and Sr. Director Hoffman responded. Ald. Lanier stated that we have talked about Cohen Street and she knows that is a ways off, but all of that area was about drainage and connectivity. She asked where the piece regarding Stiles north of the tract was, because she does not see that anywhere. Ald. Lanier expressed that her concern was that she was looking at a completion date of Cohen Street was for August 27th and with no date for Stiles. She stated that we pushed so much rhetoric about connectivity, connecting neighborhoods, and she was not seeing that when it comes to connecting the investment to the West. City Manager Melder explained. Ald. Lanier stated she has not seen Stiles as a priority because it would be here if it was a priority capital project. City Manager Melder stated that it was not a budgeted item right now, but it was a priority project, and it would be included on the next CIP update.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked why the project regarding Stiles was not budgeted. City Manager explained.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz referenced the Gamble Building renovations. She shared her experience and the progress of the renovations that she witnessed while on a tour of the building. She stated it was absolutely awesome and she wanted to thank the Council and Mayor, City Manager Melder, and Team Savannah.

Mayor Johnson mentioned the sale of the B&B building, and stated he was glad the Gamble Building did not suffer the same fate. He stated he was glad that we were retrofitting the Gamble Building to fit our current and future needs.

Ald. Palumbo stated he wanted to be clear about his feedback and this discussion because he has noticed the projects that are placed on this list, and he has noticed the ones that are missing. He noticed that some are funded with hotel motel tax and are getting into the implementation phase, but he also noticed that the tier one/priority one project of Montgomery Crossroads is a no-show at 35%. Ald. Palumbo thought that was unacceptable. He also

expressed that people demanded the passing of the hotel motel tax to get dollars out of downtown and into, throughout, the city to prioritize this trail, and to put Habersham Street at 1% was also unacceptable. Ald. Palumbo stated the largest capital expenditure that he saw in the 4th District was \$3.5M for a turf replacement at Daffin Park, which is important, but it is staff-driven. He further expressed that if he had the ability to direct those dollars, he would direct them straight to the trail and mobility and for sidewalks where people are getting hit and killed south of Derenne Avenue. Ald. Palumbo stated that if you would take a look at the equity placement of sidewalks throughout our city, you would notice that we are at about 28% coverage for the entire city on one side of the street. He stated he found that unacceptable.

Ald. Palumbo mentioned the southside precinct, which is located in the 4th District and is in a borrowed space--an old movie theater at the Oglethorpe Mall that has a roof leak. He stated that we did a great job prioritizing for our downtown headquarters in the northwest precinct, but if we are taking a look at the next five years, he noticed what was not included in the \$885M, which is a map of where the southside precinct will be going. Ald. Palumbo stated he found it unacceptable. Ald. Palumbo asked his colleagues for their help to prioritize these things.

Ald. Palumbo stated the danger of having a comprehensive presentation is that it has to be comprehensive, and he does not see it in his District, and he does not see the priorities that we need. He stated he appreciated all the hard work, but he knows we can do better than this. City Manager Melder responded to Ald. Palumbo's concerns.

Ald. Wilder stated she wanted to express Ron Feldner's motto, which is "Let us find a way on how we get to yes." She stated staff needed to find a way on how we get to yes, and the priority for the projects that are coming should have the council's input. Ald. Wilder stated we voted for this, we know what our districts want, and we would like to get more input on that.

Mayor Johnson stated that is why he thinks having a public facing opportunity works for us, so people can track it independently, and it also holds our feet to the fire about when people can expect to reasonably think that something is going to occur. Mayor Johnson stated he thinks that it is a meeting of the minds: (1) we tell you what we really think is important, (2) you tell us what you think you can get done first, (3) understanding the realities that we do not understand. He further stated that we are not charged to understand it, but to communicate it to us so that we are able to communicate it to those that we serve. Mayor Johnson stated it was just a matter of being able to communicate very clearly that this is a high-performing government; you all are moving the needle, projects are being done, and dollars are turning into projects that we can see and enjoy.

Ald. Purtee stated that he knows we keep track of the SPLOST projects on the website. He asked if we have an area where we are keeping track of capital projects on the website. He stated it would make it easier if he could just say "Hey, go to the website", or he could go to the website himself. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated that she sees a lot of capital improvement projects on the northside of the city, the westside, and eastside, but she did not want us to forget about the southside. She stated that there is not a whole lot going on over there, and she does not want it to get to the point where that area goes down in order to keep the other areas up. Ald. Miller Blakely stated we do not want it to get like West Savannah.

Mayor Johnson expressed how the southside received their first \$10M--the community center.

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

From Council Chambers at 4:07 p.m., Ald. Wilder moved to hold an executive session regarding litigation, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz and Ald. Palumbo. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

All members were present for the executive session which started at 4:18 p.m., along with the City Manager, City Attorney, and Clerk of Council. The executive session was held in the City Attorney's library/conference room on the 3rd Floor of City Hall.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz moved to adjourn the executive session, seconded by Ald. Palumbo. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0. No action was taken during executive

session.

The executive session concluded at 4:25 p.m.

[3. City Manager Updates; As Needed](#)
[TuesdayNightMemo_07092026_Final.pdf](#)

No City Manager's Update was held.

Hearing no objection, Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop at 6:02 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>

