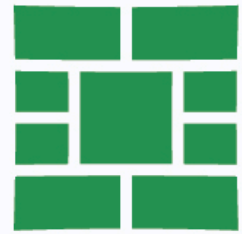


# SAVANNAH

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## MARCH 12, 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 **11:00 a.m.**, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Media Room. Chairman Nick Palumbo, called the meeting to order, then recognized Ald. Detric Leggett to offer a prayer.

#### 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-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  
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. Hotel/Motel TPD & Related Projects Update](#)

[1. Tourism Product Development Project Update Presentation.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder provided an overview of the tourism product development project. Following his presentation, he then turned it over to staff members to present related projects.

There were questions and comments from members of the City Council after each presentation, as follows:

- **The Redevelopment of River Street and Savannah's Waterfront project presented by Planning and Economic Development Chief Faye DiMassimo & Savannah's Waterfront Executive Director Julie Musselman.**

Ald. Palumbo stated that one component of this fantastic master plan was addressing the ADA requirements and improvements. He asked how we would tackle these challenges. Chief DiMassimo explained.

Ald. Leggett asked if we were considering limiting the traffic on River Street to large vehicles within the study. He expressed his concern regarding the impact of larger vehicles/buses have on the historical value of River Street. Ald. Leggett also mentioned the enforcement of "no parking" on River Street and the historic rains that may cause flooding in some of the surface lots. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked if, in light of the Skidaway corridor, there was a possibility of moving it further south to the Community Improvement District (CID). City Manager Melder stated it may not be that the Waterfront CID could stretch its boundaries all the way to Skidaway, but how do we support Skidaway businesses to create their own CID and see the value in it?

Ald. Wilder-Bryan explained that while on a tour conducted by Ms. Musselman, she saw there was some brickwork with a lot of historical markers. She stated she would like to see something like that incorporated in some of those markers down (on River Street) to explain the iron work.

Ald. Lanier asked for the amount of hotel/motel tax that we plan to invest in this project. (\$60M for the Redevelopment of River Street) She stated she would like to delve into the CID vision plan a little bit more, just in case she has some questions.

Ald. Lanier also asked about the history of Cluskey vaults next to City Hall. Ms. Spracher advised that she could share that information with her.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that, in reference to Ald. Lanier's statement regarding the Cluskey vaults, there was a group of young people who came to the council from the Shinhoster Institution, who were a part of the archaeology dig of the Cluskey vaults. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that this was a really good conversation, especially when we were talking about the markers of what took place.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz asked about the location of the elevators on the Riverwalk/River Street. City Manager Melder and Ms. Musselman advised that there is one between City Hall and the Hyatt, one at the Montgomery Street staircase, and one is being constructed on the east side, where the new Marriott hotel is going.

Ald. Lanier asked that, in reference to the 100% increase in the cost, if we are seeing that reflected in the collection, are we up on the collection side, or are we going to have to leverage that? Ald. Lanier stated that we collected \$6.9M in 2024 and 2025, and we had a \$30M projection, which is now \$60M. She then asked if \$6.9M is for all of the products or just for the River Street project. City Manager Melder explained. Ald. Lanier stated that we are going to be really creative in making this work even in servicing the debt, because if this particular one is up 100%, she could imagine that the other ones are going to be up too, because of the economy and inflation.

Ald. Lanier also mentioned she had conversations with the previous city manager, Michael Brown, about a percentage of that money for the hotel/motel and tourism products being set aside, about \$7M, to assist workers in the hospitality industry with transportation and maybe childcare. She stated she would like to relook at that and see if an allowance or something that we could do to create something that would give some relief to those who work in the hospitality industry.

Ald. Bell stated that she was going to ask about a timeline for the River Street improvements, but she sensed that, along with the other major projects, it is a phase. Ald. Bell also reflected on her experience in Ghana as it related to the holding stations for slaves mentioned by Ald. Lanier.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked Ald. Lanier for her comment regarding the allocation of funds for the workers. She also asked the City Manager to explain why the Waterfront Redevelopment project increased to \$60M as opposed to \$30M. The City Manager provided a detailed explanation.

- **The Redevelopment of the Historic Water Works Building project, presented by Real Estate Services & Capital Projects Senior Director Cristy Lawrence & Economic Development Senior Director MarRonde Lumpkin-Lotson.**

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated she knows that this is located in the 1st District, but it is a City project. She asked about what the potential programming could be for this project.

Ald. Lanier provided some historic and institutional knowledge regarding the need to uplift the west side, a marginalized, low-wealth, underinvested area, for generations. She stated that we started looking at the Water Works building, and placed it into the plan to have the community market and entrepreneurial center on the west side. Ald. Lanier stated that even the federal government recognized the area and created it as an opportunity zone. She stated, "so, we are going to move forward with making sure that the people who are impacted in the corridor are going to benefit from this, along with the entire city."

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that it has been a conversation for years, and she thinks it is very important for the council to keep the vision that has been talked about for so many decades in front of the council because we are here now. She stated that we have finally moved to the part of action and money being put aside for it.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan referenced the agenda item from the regular meeting's agenda regarding this project. She stated that in the summary report, it says that the City established a 20% DBE (Disadvantage Business Enterprise) goal with a 10% local DBE goal. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that she would like to see that information in there, so we (the council) have an upfront visual of who exactly is getting these jobs. She stated that she thinks that is a great way of letting the council know, and asked City Manager Melder if we could, moving forward, have that information as part of the summary reports. (Yes)

Ald. Palumbo stated that he would have to echo what Ald. Lanier said, and the demand is really for a marketplace. He stated that the founders who are coming up through the community need a place to be able to sell and show off their goods. Ald. Palumbo stated that there is not currently a place where they can vend and market finished goods where the margins are much higher, they can make much more money, and they can grow and scale. He stated that you will have plenty of founders, but the toughest job is going to be choosing who you would like to elect to be in that space.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked the City Manager about the cost of the project. She stated that she sees where the budget is \$9,630,650, and in the summary, it states \$9M. City Manager Melder explained. Ald. Miller Blakely also referenced Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz's statement regarding 20% DBE (Disadvantage Business Enterprise) and MWBE (Minority Women Business Enterprise). She stated that she would love to see it get to a point where we do not have to even worry about that, and where there is going to be equity across the board.

Ald. Lanier stated that there will be some subsidized spaces and some market spaces. She stated we want to see businesses, local businesses, residential businesses, and we want to see people have contracts. Ald. Lanier stated that we want to continue our projects as resident-led, citizen-led, and resident-driven. That is our new way of doing business with Savannah GPS--we are moving towards more of an equitable type of involvement as we have smart growth and development in the city.

- **Connections between Historic District, Westside Neighborhoods & Enmarket Arena project presented by Planning & Urban Design Director Bridget Lidy.**

Ald. Lanier thanked Bridget Lidy and stated that Bridget has been so dedicated to this work. She stated that the City Manager and staff have heard her, and now, we are going to extend that walking trail or sidewalk to Fell Street, and that would connect the most western neighborhood that we have. Ald. Lanier stated that she thinks that the Tide to Town Trail that comes through that portion of the city needs to be a nature trail--tree placements, an edible forest along the trail, and no asphalt.

- **Development & Construction of Tide to Town Trail Network project presented by Planning & Urban Design Director Bridget Lidy.**

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated she likes the connectivity, and that her concerns were that we need more lighting, call boxes, and cutting back of the trees and bushes, specifically in the Magnolia Park area. She stated she would like to have at least an inspection, and maybe have someone designated to do those types of things for each area to make walking that area more inviting.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz expressed her concern regarding the maps and the inequity of Tide to Town when it comes to the west side of Savannah. She stated it is a clear picture, and it is extremely clear on this map. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that people in the 5th District and in the 1st District ride bikes and need walking paths. She stated that we can include it as we move forward, but we just cannot exclude it.

Ald. Lanier stated that a year ago, we did some extensive research on trails, understanding the value of trails and what they bring, and how they can negatively impact marginalized communities. She stated that wherever there was a trail, that is where you found the most gentrification, the negative impact of displacement. Ald. Lanier stated that what needs to happen is that we have the policies, the equity policies, in place to ensure that you can ward off what we have seen in other places.

Ald. Miller Blakely also expressed her concern regarding the lighting at night on the trails. She asked the following questions, and each question was addressed by City Manager Melder:

- When do the trails close?
- Is there a certain time that you can be on the trail?
- Could we use flock cameras on the trail as well?
- Could we include flowers and an edible forest?

Ald. Palumbo stated that the Tide to Town project is going to be at its best when it is driven by the community, not by an engineer, a map, or metrics. Ald. Palumbo agreed with Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz by stating that the council needs to interact with its design to help shape it. He stated that we hear from our constituents, and we know the individual street, block, and number where it is going to be the most effective. Ald. Palumbo stated that it was exciting to see it underway, and he was glad that the council was excited, too.

- **Museum Development with Springfield Terrace School Rehabilitation, presented by Municipal Archives Director Luciana Spracher.**

Mayor Johnson stated that he was very excited about this project for a variety of reasons. He stated that there is actually a good amount of history that the neighborhood community has regarding the people who came to that school at that time and the purposes they were there for. Mayor Johnson stated that we have been able to get some money for it, and he thinks there might be some more opportunities for funding as well.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated that Pearl Smith and Fell Street schools are one and the same, just different uses by different folks, and Fell Street School is for sale now. She asked if we could purchase the Fell Street School or do something with it because it has history there as well. City Manager Melder explained how staff previously tried to negotiate a purchase

there about a year and a half ago. Ald. Miller Blakey stated that maybe we could go back and see if it could be renegotiated because that area is so desperately in need of something like a trade school to teach our young men and women how to do the trades, because that is a field that is dwindling in our city.

**• Southside Water Access and Tourism Product Development project updates were presented by City Manager Melder.**

Ald. Lanier asked if we have a time frame. City Manager Melder stated that the West Bay Street gateway enhancements are very early in planning, and we do not have a timeline now.

Mayor Johnson asked the City Manager about creating a planning matrix to reduce those projects into a way that the public would be able to follow. He stated that we have talked about dashboarding for the public so that those things are out there, and when it moves, it just changes.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked about the allocation of the \$1M for the West Bay Street gateway enhancements. She stated that \$1M is not a lot of money, and so, we are trying to understand what we could do, and maybe it will cost more than \$1M because we have increased the River Street from \$30M to \$60M.

Ald. Leggett asked in reference to the Wayfinding project, if we are going to have different companies to come in. (Yes) He asked if we would have the opportunity to sell advertisements on the wayfinding. (Yes, in exchange for the use of our right-of-way for advertising.)

[2. Boards and Commissions Appointments](#)

[UPDATED Boards MASTER LIST-2026 as of 03-09-2026.pdf](#)

Mayor Johnson facilitated a discussion on board appointments during which council members submitted nominations for various boards. The nominations are to be considered and voted upon during the March 12, 2026, Regular Council Meeting.

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

There was no Executive Session held.

[4. City Manager Updates](#)

City Manager Melder introduced Press Secretary Monique Williams and Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer Meghan Cashman Sebald.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop at 1:10 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>