



MARCH 13, 2025 - 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 **11:04 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. **Alderman Purtee** offered a prayer. Mayor Johnson requested Council members to hold an executive session, immediately following the work session during lunch.

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
 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. Public Art Masterplan Update](#)

[Exhibit 1: 031325 Savannah Public Art Master Plan.pptx](#)

The following presentation of the Public Art Masterplan was made by Chief Taffanye Young and Cultural Affairs Project Manager, Stewart Miller. The plan will come to Council in the third quarter of 2025 to consider for adoption and for the public's opinion.

Ald. Palumbo gave his highest regards for the project. He stated that the survey was fun and engaging. It is a great plan that brings all of the districts in the city together.

Mayor Johnson stated that there is some big news in public art. Cities that embrace public art are cool cities. He stated that we need to take a holistic approach to public art and making sure that we match the art with the character of the community.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the team for their presentation and was glad that the project is inclusive. She stated that it took the city to another level. She asked if we had reached out to Luciana on the history side to find out more in reference to art in Savannah.

Per Stewart Miller municipal archives is a partner agency.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan thanked him and his staff for all they do and in taking care of the new Otis Johnson Cultural Arts Center.

Ald. Lanier thanked City Manager Melder and she could see the thought behind including residents in the process as well.

Ald. Leggett stated that he saw a beautiful piece of artwork at the intersection in Cloverdale. He encouraged everyone to ride through and take a look at it.

Ald. Lanier agreed with Ald. Leggett's comment and stated that art provides traffic calming too.

[2. Water Resources Update: State Directed Surface Water Funding & Stormwater Assessment Fee Study Update](#)

[Exhibit 1: State Water Funding Presentation 031325_Final.pptx](#)

[Exhibit 1: SWMP Funding Presentation 2025_03_Final.pptx](#)

Chief of Water Resources, Ron Feldner and his team made a presentation/update on stormwater. \$125M would be reallocated to Savannah for water system improvements.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz was elated about the news that was received from City Manager Melder. She thanked the City Manager, Chief Feldner, Chief Shearouse and the entire team for going the extra mile. Great minds do great work. She also thanked Governor Kemp, Speaker Burns, and all of the legislative team for improvements that will be made specifically on the westside of Savannah and looks forward to all that is going to happen.

Ald. Bell asked how the innovative work of the team was going to affect the rate users. Chief Feldner responded that his team looked at the operational and engineering design aspect. When they brainstormed about the pipeline idea it led them to a Plan B option. Effingham was open to a proposal/regional partnership.

Mayor Johnson stated that we need staff to be innovative and creative. He thanked the City Manager and Chief Felder for creating an environment for staff to use non conventional approaches. We have to think regionally and not just about Savannah but also think about opportunities in other areas such as transportation, housing, and childcare. This is a win, win, win. He stressed the importance of maintaining those relationships in legislature.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan addressed Chief Feldner, Bryan Shaw, City Manager Melder, and Joe Shearouse, stating that it was a great plan. We have to work together and protect what we have. Attorney Bates had a lot to do with the plan too. She thanked everyone on Team Savannah.

Mayor Johnson stated that Attorney Bates has everything to do with everything.

Ald. Lanier thanked the team for their good work. She stated that the plan is intriguing. She asked Chief Feldner about the improvements that will come from the \$125M and how and what type of improvements would be reflected for the westside service area. Chief Feldner responded that water service capabilities would lead to supplying more surface water into those systems (volume, flow pressure, and appropriate level of service to residential and commercial users. She asked if we would receive more surface water and if it would be integrated with the ground water. She also asked if there was a difference in quality between surface water and ground water (both types meet all regulatory drinking water standards). Ald. Lanier asked what makes this better and why it is an improvement for those customers in the westside and downtown areas. The customer will not see a decrease in pressure.

City Manager Melder stated that these are system wide improvements. As the city grows, we need to grow our supply of water. All customers will benefit from these improvements.

Ald. Lanier asked if we would possibly lose customers with Effingham County being independent from the City of Savannah. City Manager Melder stated no and that we are a public utility that does not make money from our water system.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz clarified to the public that the westside has historically been neglected. They were not considered before, but now there will be equity throughout the city of Savannah.

[3. Strategic Plan Update](#)

[Exhibit 1: March 13 2025 Strategic Plan Update.pdf](#)

A presentation of the 2025 Strategic Plan Update was made by Chief Ron Feldner and his team. He discussed the on-going community engagement portion regarding stormwater funding and utility.

City Manager Melder stated that we would be out in the community to discuss the stormwater projects and how they are currently funded and how the stormwater user fee might help fund these projects in the future.

Mayor Johnson stated that there was unanimous support and consensus. To ensure that citizens are very clear, explanations should be elementary so that the citizens see the necessity for it in the future. He also suggested that we put a focus group together to respond to questions.

Ald. Palumbo echoed the Mayor's statements and stated that this was a rare opportunity to share with residents the issues that we are facing. We have been very blessed that we have not faced a direct hit. For example, he stated that having onsite meetings at Springfield Canal and other locations would show that sea level rises. This is about adding capacity, which is exciting. Well done.

Ald. Bell echoed the Mayor's and Ald. Palumbo's comments about the focus team and threw out the idea that a focus team should be comprised of citizens from each of the districts. This band of citizens would be like an extension of city staff who understands what is happening. This can only help us in the end because it is going to be costly.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that we did a stellar job in the marketing of our strategic plan and GPS. We got strong results of involvement and engagement from our public.

Ald. Lanier stated that the the next steps with community engagement is where we need to be. She thought that we were moving away from the small groups where nothing gets done. She stated she thinks the city is on the right track. We have approached it from that small representative group and she feels that we need to go forward with more inclusive planning. Ald. Lanier shared that the issue is difficult for her but she understands that we need that fee and how it makes sense. However, she also understands the importance of meeting with residents in a marginalized corridor (close to the #1 issue on the westside). The process is good because it gives staff an opportunity to explain to residents.

Mayor Johnson added that the consequence of not acting in this situation to areas that are marginalized, may cause more devastating case scenarios. To Ald. Lanier's point, we need to make the case and there is a price for living where we live. We are not going to be that city that wishes we should have done something else. It has to be plain, clear, and convincing, and the data has to support it.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the City Manager and Chief Feldner for having Judy Adler from (GEFA) Georgia Environmental Finance Authority, in-house.

City Manager Melder gave a special shout out to Chief Ron Feldner. Ron has brought the technical, leadership, and management expertise to move these efforts forward. He stated that we have a phenomenal group of engineers and leaders in our Water Resources Team.

Mayor Johnson agreed and stated that we have to recognize talent.

Daphanie Williams Chief of Staff, made a presentation/update on the 2025 Savannah GPS. She encouraged the public to take the online survey. Their voice is needed to make this happen.

Mayor Johnson thanked Daphanie Williams and her team for their hard work. He stated that we over communicated and that no one can say that they had not heard anything about it.

Ald. Purtee stated that he was very excited that the Windsor Forest Community Meeting was packed. Citizens were excited and engaged, and it was a diverse crowd. He appreciated that they were looking forward to ongoing engagement with the city. Going forward we need to constantly solicit feedback from the community, especially looking at what the community values. Once we get the youth involved, we will really hit our mark.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz reiterated what Ald. Purtee stated and that even though her district is very large, some citizens who reside closer to Ald. Purtee's district are included in the conversations. His district has facilities that may be closer to access for those citizens as well.

City Manager Melder commended At-Large Ald. Bell and Ald. Miller Blakely who showed up to every one of the meetings and helped out.

Ald. Lanier thanked them for the work. She shared the importance of the meetings and the numerous discussions with the citizens. They heard the message 3-4 times. She applauded everyone on staff that helped to get the word out. You have to be vigilant; citizenship is an action word - you have to get out and get involved.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked Daphanie Williams, her staff and Team Savannah. She suggested that they continue advertising and letting the public know that we are not finished. The survey is very important especially for those who could not make it to the meetings.

[4. Appointments to Boards, Commissions and Authorities](#)

The Mayor addressed the Council, stating that they would read through the board appointments. He facilitated a discussion of the various Boards, Commissions and Authorities. Council members shared their selections of who should be considered from the available vacancies and applicants. The Mayor also stated that preference should be given to our residents. He further stressed that this is important work and individuals who are on these boards are acting as an extension of the work that we do in the City of Savannah.

In specific instances, if a board/commission/authority did not have a sufficient amount of applicants, Council members requested that additional time be allowed for more individuals to apply.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked if there was an attendance record for people who serve on the boards. The Clerk stated that he would request the information.

The Mayor stated that in speaking to the Clerk that they plan to create better opportunities in orientations to the boards.

Ald. Lanier asked if there was a description of each of the thirty-five boards and what they do. She thanked the Clerk's Office for including all of the many resumes. She stated that she was disappointed that there were no applicants from District 1, however, she applauded District 3 for the large number of applicants and thanked them for their dedication, reliability and service.

Mayor Johnson stated that if anyone is interested in applying to the any of the 35 Boards, Commissions, and Authorities they can visit the Clerk of Council's website, and see a description for all of them. He encouraged residents to be engaged and involved.

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

City Manager Melder stated there was a representation of all of the city's marshals. They are from all of the city departments and were trained and deputized. He recognized them and thanked them for their time. In addition, he recognized the Chief City Marshal and Revenue Director, Judee Jones, and Code Compliance Senior Director, Cynthia Knight. There are 84 deputized and badged City Marshals, who are to ensure that people have a safe time and ordinances are followed at all of the St. Patrick's Day weekend events.

Ald. Bell stated that the first requirement to be a deputy is that you be member of the staff.

6. Closed Executive Session Regarding Personnel, Real Estate, and Litigation.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz moved to close the work session and hold an executive session regarding litigation and personnel, seconded by Ald. Palumbo and Ald. Miller Blakely. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

The executive session began at 1:15 p.m. All members were present, including the City Manager Melder, City Attorney Lovett, and Clerk of Council Massey.

Ald. Leggett moved to close/adjourn the executive session regarding litigation and personnel, seconded by Ald. Wilder-Bryan The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

There was no action taken during the Workshop.

Mayor Johnson recessed the work session at 1:00 p.m. to hold the executive session.

No action was taken during the executive session, and both meetings were adjourned at 1:59 p.m., upon its conclusion.

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>

