



MAY 14, 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 **11:03 a.m.**, in the 2nd Floor Media Room. Mayor Johnson, called the meeting to order, then recognized then recognized Ald. Kurtis Purtee 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, 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
 Deputy Clerk of Council Gwendolyn Jones
 Assistant to Clerk of Council Renee Osborne

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Solid Waste/ Illegal Dumping/ Glass Recycling Discussion](#)

Mayor Johnson stated that staff has been asking about the following topics for some time. He was appreciative to staff for their commitment to the presentations.

The following presentations were made at the Work Session by City Manager Melder, Chief of Government Operations Gene Prevatt, Senior Code Compliance Director Cynthia Knight, Senior Director of Solid Waste Quannah Andrews, and Director of Park and Tree Gordon Denney.

Ald. Purtee commended Ald. Wilder for spearheading the Rock The Block initiative. He stated that most districts have adopted this practice which seemed to help. He also asked if the cost of the clean up included encampments. (Yes) Encampments on private property are still under the obligation of the property owner, however, Code Compliance is willing to work with them. Ald. Purtee observed that when 311 requests are submitted for areas such as Abercorn, Middleground, and White Bluff Road, trash often reappears shortly after clean up. Ald. Purtee asked if the right-of-way areas are contracted for clean up as well. (Yes) He saw that there is also an increase of trash at the side of the road and in gutters. He stated that we may need to budget more folks to get out to clean it up. We need to focus on behavioral changes.

Mayor Johnson stated that behaviors must change. He posed a question, is this happening cause there is no where (convenient) to legally dump? Could the behavior be addressed in the moment? The Mayor also asked when was the last time an individual was cited for illegal dumping.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked Ald. Wilder for her lead on the The Rock the Block initiative (also referred to as the Fabulous 5th District Clean Up). She expressed that she and Ald. Miller Blakely made a concentrated effort to respond to residents' calls. They worked together to ensure balanced coverage across the entire district. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that 311 works and urged citizens to call (311) or their alderman because it is the eyes of the people that sees what goes on, and it is reflected in the numbers. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz agrees with moving forward with an endorsement of a state ordinance and the enforcement of these dumping infractions. She thanked Mayor Johnson and City Council for the leadership; everyone needs to be on board with keeping Savannah beautiful as well as continuing to fund the efforts to make sure that departments have what they need to keep the city beautiful.

Ald. Palumbo thanked the department for the presentation and their approach. He stated that beauty is our brand and our identity. He shared that we live in a special place that we want to keep beautiful. Illegal dumping becomes the cost of doing business for some people. He asked if there were any programs out there that reward proper disposal with incentives. Ald. Palumbo stated that understanding the psychology of the enforcement is tough. We get the benefit of being paid in huge dividends if we encourage good behavior.

Ald. Leggett thanked the different teams for their presentations. He made three points: 1) We should highlight the people who are being targeted for illegal dumping. For example, there are senior citizens who do not see the illegal dumping on their property because they do not go into their back yards. 2) He wanted to emphasize that trash is being left behind due to evictions and should be the responsibility of the property owner. 3) Chatham Area Transit (CAT) has a new initiative to invest funds into maintaining trash receptacles at the bus stop. He invited everyone to the Thomas Square Clean Up event and was excited to see the community working together.

Ald. Bell thanked the team for all that they are doing. She gave a special shout out to Ms. Knight for her support with a private property owner. Ald. Bell stated that she loves 311 and loves what it has continued to do over the years. She mentioned that Keep Savannah Beautiful has engaged or involved civic organizations, fraternities, and sororities for many years. She also stated that she is interested in adopting state ordinances that we may want to localize. Ald. Bell stated that she appreciated Ald. Palumbo's idea using positive incentives for people who are doing the right thing.

Ald. Lanier thanked the staff for their presentation and for the work they are doing. She emphasized the importance of maintaining clarity and avoiding confusion between issues related to sanitation, general trash, and illegal dumping. The problem lies in that people feel that it is easy to dump in Savannah, especially in the 1st District. It is indicative of the way the 1st District is treated overall. It is a public and environmental health crisis. She stated that we need to send a message and create a standard by making people pay fines for dumping. We must establish a clear standard — draw a hard line for offenders and strengthen the ordinance so it is understood that these areas are not landfills. Ald. Lanier stated that Mr. Prevatt is correct in that money is being passed on to the City by businesses who are not paying for their cost of doing business. She asked how other (clean) cities are doing it; this is an issue that is impacting the entire city.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked the team for the presentation. For the last six years she has been saying, if it ain't broke why are we trying to fix it? People used to speak about how pretty the city was years ago. She wondered how we can go back to the days when the city used to be (so clean). She stated that we might need to pay more to get more. We should start talking to the Board of Education to connect with the school children to help educate their own families about the dos and don'ts of trash. To further share the knowledge, Ald. Miller Blakely suggested that speaking to the Board of Education about distributing a flyer or advertisement to the parents. In addition, Ald. Miller Blakely asked about disposal of bulk items, ie. couches, etc. and special collection times for furniture; and what about the trash in the median/right-of-way? Can the garbage collectors pick that up? (Yes, per Gene Prevatt via the litter abatement team and the median maintenance team)

Mayor Johnson stated that there are very few days where he has not seen staff picking up trash all over the city. He agreed with Ald. Lanier's point of severe penalization to offenders. He stated that it is not a lack of effort on our part - it is a laissez faire attitude that people have that is okay to dump. He shared this is why summer programs are so important - young people can change their behavior when they have to pick up the trash. We need to create a high profile sting to make them visible and punish them. Our money is doing what it is supposed to do; it is the behavior that must change.

Ald. Wilder stated that there have been many discussions about staff shortages. She inquired how many people/staff are needed to complete the roster in code compliance positions and sanitation positions, and what is the vacancy rate. She stated that we need to fix the understaffed departments before an ordinance is created. Despite the challenges, Ald. Wilder thanked Cynthia Knight and Carliss Bates. "Why can't each department go to the site and come up with a creative solution?" We need stronger consequences and stricter fines. Cases should not be ignored or left sitting in court without action. We are especially frustrated with negligent landlords who allow illegal dumping on their properties. Convenience centers are available but people do not want to pay the fees. She suggested that we create a deterrent that is not a slap on the wrist.

Mayor Johnson stated that the Council can have whatever we are willing to pay for. The budget is based on priorities.

Ald. Bell asked that if a contractor is renovating a property, etc. are they or the company not responsible for removing used fixtures (toilet fixtures, sinks) dumped in lanes, and be cited accordingly. (Yes, if they are observed doing it).

Ald. Wilder asked if the landfill off Skidaway Road can be a convenience center? (Yes, as long as it is from a home). How do we know that people are not going to other convenience centers? (They may be asked for identification or proof of residence). Ald. Wilder stated that we do not have a good communication piece about free dumping services.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked Gordon Denney what the difference is between an overgrown yard and the term wilding. (Grass cannot be over 10 inches high or it is counted as overgrowth).

Mayor Johnson stated that we have to catch people, and that big intentional changes interrupt the current way of doing business.

Ald. Wilder stated that we must be prepared for the first public hearing regarding Solid Waste Management Plan. She stated any information she could receive in advance would be appreciated in order to be better prepared.

Mayor Johnson stated that there will be plenty of time to prepare during our artificial hiatus in July.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz asked where the glass recycling locations are shown on the map.

Ald. Palumbo stated that glass is a commodity that is trying to find a market. He stated that he really appreciated Ms. Mason and her team for persevering with the project and finding this new opportunity. People need to recycle their glass, and that this will help us (the community) in the long run.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked how the glass will be separated.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that there is a loud outcry from the citizens for glass recycling and everybody has to do their part. We are bringing it back - let's get it done!

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

No Executive Session was Held.

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

No City Manager's Update was Held.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop session at 12:54 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>

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