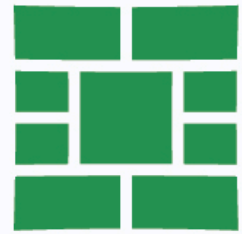


SAVANNAH

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MAY 28, 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 **11:04 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
 Clerk of Council Mark Massey
 Deputy Clerk of Council Gwendolyn Jones

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. 2026 Workshop Roundup Discussion](#)

[1. Workshop Roundup Presentation.pdf](#)

Mayor Johnson stated the council had previously asked the City Manager and team to explore a variety of initiatives not only from our retreat but also through our strategic plan. He stated the staff has researched and presented those items, and they are now at a decision point of whether to go forward or leave things as they are. Mayor Johnson thanked City Manager Melder and the team for their diligence in doing what the council has asked them to do as it relates to

these things. Mayor Johnson stated that the workshop would be more of a review of where we have been so that the council can determine and give direction about how to move forward.

Following each presentation, City Council members discussed and asked questions:

- **Public Art Master Plan presented by Assistant City Manager Taffanye Young and Chief of Community Services Ashley Reynolds Marshall.**

Mayor Johnson stated he was a fan of public art, and great cities have great public art opportunities. He expressed that after listening to the council's concerns, staff made significant changes to incorporate more community involvement in public art.

Ald. Palumbo thanked staff for the improvements and for listening to the feedback. He stated that the residents of his District are actively looking to engage in the process and to bring some of that public art and activation, especially to the southside, with parks and recreation amenities, and looking to have some fun too.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked staff for the presentation. She asked a question regarding the second point of engagement, the public art artist selection committee, and the inclusion of the two residents from the immediate area. Ald. Miller Blakely also asked if the projects were going to take place at different intervals and different times. Assistant City Manager Young stated that, yes, the goal is to have a five-member panel and have two of the members on that panel be residents. Ald. Miller Blakely asked for clarification as to whether the panel would change every time there was a different location. (Yes) She also referenced Ald. Palumbo's sentiment regarding the southside, and she stated the council needed staff to definitely come out there because a whole lot of stuff is focused downtown and midtown, and not on the southside.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz expressed her appreciation for staff listening to their concerns and coming back with stellar responses. She stated one thing that she knows is that when we engage our community and have them involved, especially having our citizens move forward with us, is great work. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated she was excited about moving forward.

Ald. Leggett stated the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Districts, primarily the 2nd District, are the gateways to the city. He stated that he wanted something that was going to highlight what they are seeing to serve as a gateway to the rest of the city. So, we are looking forward to stretching what is happening downtown out to the southside, but people would not know it is there. Ald. Leggett expressed that this is our contribution to GPS, which is sending people to the southside by putting public art (in places) to lead people there. He stated he appreciated the collective opportunity for the community members to be a part of it, but we really want to have a lot of transparency as each step occurs. Ald. Leggett stated we want to make sure to involve/engage not only the neighborhood associations but people who may sit on the front porch or have something to say because those are the people who have to live there. Ald. Leggett acknowledged the street public art in Cloverdale. He stated that it is the type of thing that we are looking at and what the council has been advocating for.

Ald. Wilder asked how many spaces each District will have for public art. She asked if the district alderman was going to be involved in the location of the public art. Ald. Wilder stated she wanted it to be equitable and would like, specifically for her District, it to be in some of the places that we do not normally go to when we talk about engaging. She would want the main ones to be where there are children and for the elderly people who sit on their porch. Ald. Wilder stated that when people see those little things, maybe they might pay attention to other things and get involved. She also added that the council attends municipal trainings and hears other conversations about what other people are doing in their community. Ald. Wilder suggested involving people who are taggers by offering a moratorium, a specific place to tag their artwork and not worry about being prosecuted.

Mayor Johnson stated that the benefit of having a strategic plan, particularly with equity baked in, is that equity is also location, and because it is coming out of a strategic plan, the equity ethos drove that, and it is why it will be much more spread out, which is important. Mayor Johnson stated the only change is that wherever we have residents involved, he thinks that we should have an equal amount of individuals under the age of 21, because what adults think is cool, kids do not think is cool. He noted that this would be a cross-age collaboration while

validating the young people by saying "This is your community too and you should have a voice in what happens here." Mayor Johnson further expressed that he thinks if we are intentionally bringing them in at the front of it, we get them involved in government, involved in the process, and these would be the recipients of the legacies that we are passing off. He stated that if the council was supportive of involving the young people, he would like that to be added.

Ald. Lanier stated the changes were definitely in sync with what the council presented back in the fall. She stated she remembers that meeting because the council talked about several things and our approach. Ald. Lanier stated the council talked about creators' placement and staff have employed that here. She explained how there were some things going on in Savannah including how we approach art and how the people and the council did not like it. So, we needed to approach these in a policy way, and that is why we needed a community benefits strategic approach, which is our GPS. Ald. Lanier stated we needed to go into our different areas and create more livability and use creative placemaking, which is driven by art. She stated that what we are doing now is being intentional about using these policy initiatives so we can create different outcomes in these areas. Ald. Lanier expressed that she was looking forward to seeing these outcomes. She also stated she was glad that staff were putting a maintenance piece in the plan because that was not included. She stated the artist would not like to see their artwork looking shabby after they installed it, which has been happening. Ald. Lanier expressed the need to include the artist regarding the maintenance so we would not compromise the art.

Ald. Bell asked if the public arts committee would come from the existing Cultural Affairs Commission. Assistant City Manager Young responded. Ald. Bell stated that from this morning's discussion, you will be intentional and select youth as well. (Yes, we will make sure that it is a part of the policy.)

• Parking Matters presented by City Manager Melder, Planning and Economic Chief Faye DiMassimo, and Parking Manager Kimberly Sanderson.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked whether parking would be put on Whitaker and Drayton streets if we are changing it to a one-lane. City Manager Melder stated that the Whitaker and Drayton Street proposals from neighborhood associations or others were not part of the Parking Matters Plan, and that would need to be considered down the road by the council if we were making changes to the traffic pattern of Drayton and Whitaker. Ald. Miller Blakely stated that when you start talking about Drayton and Whitaker Street, she would like to see residents from all over the city be involved because everyone in the city uses Drayton and Whitaker.

Mayor Johnson stated he wanted to make sure that we stayed focused on the matter at hand, and the matter at hand is not traffic but parking. He stated in his history that on at least two occasions, the council has looked at parking on Drayton and Whitaker, and it just never really worked out. Mayor Johnson expressed that there is an extreme opportunity for us, which is an educational opportunity to incentivize public transportation and ride-sharing. He elaborated on how people are moving differently than before. Mayor Johnson stated that there are some easier ways, and we have to create those opportunities.

Ald. Leggett explained that after talking to people who live around the park, the number one issue was SCAD students who park their cars, leave the cars there, and use the SCAD transportation to get around the entire District. So that takes away a lot of the parking from residents who live down on Gordon, Whitaker, Waldburg, Bolton, and Hall streets. Ald. Leggett stated that we have to have a conversation with SCAD about that. He further expressed that SCAD students are moving out today, and if we were to look at, from today to the day they move back in, what our parking grid looks like, and then we could have a real conversation with SCAD. Ald. Leggett addressed his concerns regarding Drayton and Whitaker Street. He stated we have to think about everybody holistically and how they are going to move. Ald. Leggett stated we have to have another conversation about how we are allowing construction crews to put out these big dumpsters that take three and four parking spaces away. Ald. Leggett stated he has a lot of questions and was not ready to move forward with the plan until we really address it or until we really look at how the moving in and out of SCAD students impacts the community. City Manager Melder replied to Ald. Leggett's concern around nonresidential parking use, especially in the Victorian and Thomas Square neighborhoods. Ald. Leggett stated he was comfortable

with the City Manager's response, but he wanted to make sure we have a plan to give every resident a place or two that they can identify.

Mayor Johnson asked why our response cannot be seasonal, because we know that after graduation, things change. He stated he knew it would take some work, but he thinks that our best response would be in response to the actual situation at hand. City Manager responded.

Ald. Bell stated that she agrees with the fact that parking demands change in the Victorian District, particularly around Forsyth Park for about a two-or-three block radius. She also agreed with Alderman Leggett regarding tracking how the demand changes in the summer when SCAD is gone or over a major holiday like Christmas and New Year's. Ald. Bell stated she would not hesitate or bank on a fluid kind of arrangement because it is hard enough for seniors to remember the rules on when you can or cannot park on the side of the street. So, if you start making changes to summertime versus fall, it could be a little bit problematic.

• River Street Vision Plan presented by Savannah's Waterfront Community Improvement District (CID) Executive Director Julie Ford Musselman and Planning and Economic Chief Faye DiMassimo.

Mayor Johnson stated the CID is a vision move, and it is the first one we have here. It really allows some great and unique things to occur. Mayor Johnson thanked the council for approving it and commended Director Julie Musselman and CID for doing a masterful job. He also stated he was excited for River Street because it is in need of a lot of tender loving care. Mayor Johnson stated the book provided showed the amount of work, detail, care, and engagement the Savannah Waterfront Community Improvement District had done. He stated the document really spells out a very well-thought-out process to be able to get there.

Ald. Miller Blakely commended Director Julie Musselman and her team by stating they did a phenomenal job. Ald. Miller Blakely shared about her trip to Pompano Beach, Florida. She stated that what she saw there were some of the things that CID had planned for River Street, and she was impressed. Ald. Miller Blakely stated she was so happy that this was going to be accessible to everybody--it does not matter if you are on crutches, in a wheelchair, or whatever, you will be able to go and enjoy our River Street.

Ald. Leggett stated that he knows this has been a tug of war and a struggle. He stated he agreed with everything in the master plan for River Street, but he shares River Street with the 1st District and portions of the 3rd. Ald. Leggett stated that the issue we are having is the nightlife and the traffic that goes down River Street. Ald. Leggett asked if there was any way to put some ballers/ barricades up to stop traffic at certain times of night because people are driving 30 miles per hour on cobblestone, and it is a matter of time before somebody hits something. (Yes) Ald. Leggett stated he is looking forward to our investment with the hotel/motel tax for the wayfinding signage so people know where they are, where they are going, and hopefully to just take pictures.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabzz stated she appreciated the work that has been done. She expressed that she was looking forward to the implementation of the design, the engineering, and the construction.

Ald. Wilder expressed that there was SPLOST money allocated for Skidaway, and she was interested in making this the litmus test or the design pattern for something similar to this. She stated that with this type of plan, the engagement and involvement, we know that it works. Ald. Wilder stated we want to have these conversations about having the same thing and the possibilities as we move forward on Skidaway, and we want the same kind of thing to happen for midtown that is happening in downtown.

Ald. Palumbo commended Director Julie Musselman for being a model member of our business community and a model Savannahian. He said, "Look at what we can accomplish when we work together out in the open in partnership." Ald. Palumbo stated he remembers that long walk when he was in his earliest days of office, identifying some of these items when it was just a dream, and now, we are bringing it into reality.

Mayor Johnson stated River Street has not been accessible for all, and if you are mobility challenged or a senior, you do not get the opportunity to enjoy what other people get to enjoy. He further stated that although he is a firm believer in history, history also has to make sense. Mayor Johnson expressed that we want everyone to experience our city regardless of their ability, and so, we find opportunities to make improvements around accessibility.

Ald. Lanier congratulated Director Musselman on this huge accomplishment and on all the work that she put into this.

• Forsyth Master Plan presented by Park & Tree Director Gordon Denney.

Ald. Leggett stated that he knows that some of the neighborhood associations do not want it to be just about them. They want it to be a holistic thing for the entire community to formally bring that forward, so everybody has a voice in it and gives it the same type of consideration that we give everything else. Ald. Leggett stated he wanted to make sure that we have everybody's input, including council, everybody who uses the park, and people who have historically used the park. He expressed that he looks forward to the new basketball and tennis courts, but not to the adoption of the master plan itself.

Ald. Lanier stated that what we are seeing here is when we met with that committee during COVID, and she thought those ladies had done a great job on the plan, but this was right before we did the GPS. She said, "So, what we could see here now is how we were doing things prior, and how we are now trying to put citizens first." Ald. Lanier recommended staff talk to more of the stakeholders who are at least in the area. She expressed that although she did not see anything, when they presented it, that would have been limiting and inequitable to anybody in the city, but we are now approaching these things a little differently.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked Director Denney for his presentation. She stated she saw where the Rotary Club was doing the gathering space project, which was awesome. Ald. Miller Blakely asked how somebody would adopt a particular area in the park--how do we go about that? Because she knows there are a lot of organizations that would love to have something in that area that says "we adopted this" or "supported this." City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Lanier requested that the fixing of the splash pad be expedited.

Ald. Leggett stated he was okay with everything except for the consideration of adopting the master plan portion. He stated there are some things in the master plan that he thinks the community still has to work on. City Manager Melder stated he would see what process we would do to get the right kind of community engagement and citizen-led effort so that the council is comfortable moving forward.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked if the master plan would include a particular entity that determines who can use certain park facilities at a certain time. (No)

• Housing Toolkit presented by Planning and Urban Design Director Bridget Lidy and Assistant Director Edward Morrow.

Ald. Bell commended Director Lidy and Assistant Director Morrow for their outreach efforts. She stated she noticed that they are doing a presentation for the homebuilders association, and stated that it was wonderful that they were making the homebuilders aware of the changes that the council has made.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked when the mid-budget meeting was (June 25th) and what the dates are that the council will not be meeting? (The last July meeting is July 9th and will not meet again until August 13th.)

Ald. Lanier asked about the presentation to MPC and the text amendment. Director Lidy stated the text amendment for these changes goes to MPC for review, and MPC would make the formal recommendation to the council. Ald. Lanier also asked about the inclusionary zoning. Director Lidy responded.

Ald. Wilder asked when the council would have another mobile workshop. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Miller Blakely suggested a mobile tour of all of the parks.

[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 Update was held.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop session at 1:12 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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