



NOVEMBER 25, 2025 - 9:00 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 **9:02 a.m.**, in the 2nd Floor Media Room. Mayor Johnson called the meeting to order, then recognized Ald. Kurtis Purtee to offer a prayer.

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
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. Continuation of the FY 2026 Budget Retreat](#)

In continuation of the Budget Retreat held on November 17, 2025, City Manager Melder, Interim Chief of Community Services Melissa Carter, and Financial Services Sr. Director David Maxwell made the following presentations:

- FY26 Proposed Enterprise Funds & Debt Service

- FY26 Proposed Budget Framework
- Proposed Five-Year Capital Plan Overview

Following each presentation, the Mayor & Aldermen weighed-in, asked questions, offered comments, and/or made requests.

The Management and Budget Team compiled a "Parking Lot" of requests, based upon matters raised by the Mayor and Aldermen.

No action was taken.

[2. Stormwater Utility Update](#)

[2. Stormwater Utility Update Presentation.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder stated that we have talked about the feasibility of a stormwater utility for several years. He introduced Chief of Water Resources Ronald Feldner, who presented the specifics of the utility and the rates.

Following the presentation, there were questions and comments from members of the City Council:

Mayor Johnson stated that a lot of work has gone into this, and we do not want to kick the can down the road. Mayor Johnson stated we have to do something more significant, more ongoing, more dedicated, and more specific, and this helps us to be able to get there. He stated that he thinks we are on the right track, and this is a direct answer to what appears to be the prevailing and hardest issue among us.

Mayor Johnson stated there is a difference between a fee and a tax. He stated that the thing about taxes is that there are some entities that are exempt from paying taxes, but with fees, everybody pays their fair share of whatever that is. Mayor Johnson thanked City Manager Melder, Chief Feldner, and Stormwater Director Zack Hoffman. He stated he was really impressed with the engagement.

Ald. Palumbo stated he wanted to echo the Mayor's sentiments by stating this may be the most thoroughly vetted initiative that we have seen on Council, that is, an extraordinarily deliberate involvement of a Citizen Advisory Committee. He thanked the committee members for their service. Ald. Palumbo stated that identifying the needs in a workshop that defined it down to a number, and the investment that we need to get residents out of a 100-year flood.

Ald. Palumbo stated that there were ample number of opportunities to get involved, and he wanted to commend the entire team, specifically Chief Ronald Feldner for his level of care throughout the entire process to get everyone on board, to make sure it was well understood, well vetted, well reasoned, and provided an equitable approach that exceeds even our peers of other cities to have a tiered system for residences and the fees based on impervious surfaces. Ald. Palumbo stated it is time to make an investment.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the City Manager and Chief Feldner for a very well executed plan for community outreach, including the entire city of Savannah, all of the districts, and even greater in her area, because she has the largest landmass district. She stated it was one of the most well-organized community engagements that she has seen in the city.

Ald. Bell stated she also wanted to thank City Manager Melder and Chief Feldner for listening to Council when they shared what they learned while attending the National League of Cities conference and speaking with their colleagues about addressing stormwater needs, namely, engaging the citizens upfront.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that she was confident that it would roll out the way that it is supposed to. She stated that most of the districts are saying the same thing. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that after it is rolled out in July, we are going to have a lot of questions from people who did not come (to the community engagement events) for whatever reason. She asked if a shorter version (of the presentation) could be provided after the rollout in the communities or the districts. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated she thinks that would close the gap for people who missed that first chance to see how it is actually going to work and how it would affect them and their water bill.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that the water services are going to be coming under the supervision of Chief Feldner. She asked if the citizens would still pay their bills at the same place or if the logistics were going to change. (Initially, no, but as the Adams Complex expands, the plan is to move there.) Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked Chief Feldner if he would think about incorporating the ability for people to pay their water bills inside of grocery stores. She stated that we do not want to reinvent the wheel, but we want to keep that wheel greased so that our people who had a problem going to that site will not have the same problem going to Adams. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that if we can identify the customer service aspects of our people who do not have transportation, we want to offer an easier way to pay bills for anybody.

Ald. Lanier asked Chief Feldner if he had an opportunity to observe the impact of the fee. Chief Feldner responded. She stated she can see the possibility of this being a really good tool for a community, and it could really work and impact our drainage system here. Ald. Lanier stated that, based on the area she represents, having so many marginalized and low-wealth people, it was very difficult to support a fee because we know the definition of being underserved and marginalized is that you really did not get what you were paying for all along. She stated that, however, the staff did a really good job in implementing the new strategic plan for engagement. Ald. Lanier stated the process was what really convinced her to bring support, and the staff did a good job in allowing the Council to ascertain how the community wanted to be led on this.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked how the staff will determine which area needs the service. Chief Feldner explained. She also asked the City Manager about the use of SPLOST funds for this type of project and for a copy of the policy and law regarding the use of SPLOST.

Mayor Johnson introduced City Attorney Bates Lovett to provide an update to the Council on legal matters concerning stormwater utilities in the state of Georgia. City Manager Melder added to the comments of the City Attorney regarding risks.

Mayor Johnson stated that he thinks City Manager Melder would concur that we should add this to our legislative agenda, and he knows for certain that we are going to ask GMA to help us follow and track that as well.

Ald. Lanier stated, based on the definition the City Attorney just gave them, asked if the fee could be based on any type of set-offs or rain barrels. City Attorney Lovett responded.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked if it was anyway possible that we could change it from a fee to a tax and allow the constituents to decide whether or not they want to pay it. City Attorney Lovett and City Manager Melder provided a response. Ald. Miller Blakely asked that when you say only taxable properties will be taxed, if it were a tax, are you saying that SCAD would not have to pay anything? (Yes, no non-profit entity would have to pay.) She also asked about the utility rate fee. City Manager Melder explained the fee structure.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that the Council just wants our citizens to know that stormwater is not a tax; it is a user fee based on the formula we have. She stated that to not confuse the two together (the property tax and the user fee); people want to know that this user fee is going to be based on what they use and not an additional tax. (Yes.) Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that the stormwater (utility fee) is for the maintenance of it and to make sure we keep the quality of our water; so that is what we want to hear and what we want to convey.

Mayor Johnson stated that this is the best way for us to get to where our citizens want us to be, equitable, and he thinks that our position should be that we work and we do what we want to do, and just watch. He stated that he thinks we should move forward, and then if we have to do something different, then we will do something different.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked Mayor Johnson would it be based on the fact that we have already charged these fees because you are saying that they will not be billed until July 2026. Mayor Johnson stated our liabilities are only if we collect (utility fees). City Manager Melder also provided a response.

[3. Adding to the Housing Toolkit Discussion](#)

There was no discussion held for workshop agenda item #3.

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

There was no executive session held.

[5. City Manager Updates](#)

There was no City Manager's update held.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop session at 2:09 p.m.

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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