



NOVEMBER 26, 2024 - 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 11:01 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, then recognized Alderman 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
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. FY25 Proposed Budget Framework/Proposed Five-Year Capital Plan Overview](#)

[Exhibit 1: FY25 Proposed Budget Framework and Capital Plan.pptx](#)

FY25 Proposed Budget Framework/Proposed Five-Year Capital Plan Overview

The Mayor stated that one of the major responsibilities of the Savannah City Manager is to present for consideration a budget proposal that is ultimately approved by the Savannah City Council. The budget deadline is December 31st, 2024, and will go into effect January 1, 2025. Today is part 2 of this workshop and the purpose is to finish the budget meeting presentations from November 20th. The Mayor asked the budget team to stand to be recognized.

City Manager, Melder, wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and thanked the Mayor and Council for a fruitful, informative and meaningful Budget Meeting Retreat. He handed it over to the Budget Team to finish up their presentations around the Framework and Capital Plan by Budget Director Sansia Joseph-Jarvis, Capital Projects Manager Victoria Keller, and joined by Chief Operating Officer, Melissa Carter. The City Manager believes that the proposed budget of \$602M is balanced

and offers high quality and improved services for our residents. This budget has no tax rate increases or planned draws from the General or Enterprise Fund Reserves with a millage rate of 12.20% (lowest since 1987). For FY25 there is \$78.3M in planned capital spending and other active capital projects. The budget also includes \$5.3M in budget cuts and efficiencies - each year we go through the budget and find where we can save and cut to reduce costs in the organization as well as for tax and rate payers. Sansia Joseph-Jarvis began by stating the 6 priorities which are (feel free to view the entire Workshop online [City Council Workshop 11-26-24](#)):

- 1) Invest in Equitable Community Development
- 2) Increase Public Safety
- 3) Planned in Livable Environments
- 4) Improve Quality of Life by Raising Municipal Service Standards
- 5) Expand Economic Access, Opportunity, & Vitality for All
- 6) Always be a High-Performing Government

The team also sought information from the public and launched a survey over the summer months. Citizens top priorities were Stormwater infrastructure designed to mitigate the impact of rainwater; Housing to ensure safe, affordable housing, and Human Services to support the social needs and well-being of our residents. Ms. Joseph-Jarvis thanked the citizens for engaging and making their voices heard. With the budget being \$602M, it is the largest budget to date. \$11.1M has been set aside for COLA(?). The 2025 budget conservatively projects overall growth despite other revenue sources remaining volatile. The presentation next addressed where the money comes from. The General Fund revenue is \$291 million and taxes are \$206M of the general fund revenue (71%). Property taxes are the largest and most stable revenue source at about 37.8% of the total general fund revenues. Other taxes have an increase of about 5% and are leveling out for the coming year. Ms. Joseph-Jarvis discussed the expenses of the general fund with 52.7% being paid in personnel costs. This equates to about \$166M in personnel services from the general fund.

City Manager Melder stated that the budget decreased this year from last year due to emergency spending due to the hurricanes and storms. Most of those funds will be reimbursed from FEMA and reimbursed close to 100%. As a note he mentioned that the City is expecting modest growth in property tax and sales tax growth is plateauing.

The presentation was turned over to Victoria Keller, Principal Budget Analyst, who stated that the capital plan is looking at new allocations. The City currently has 271 active projects with an available balance of over \$340M but these projects can take several years to complete. In order to get active project status go to the Capital Projects Management site on savannahga.gov where you can navigate under Government, then Management Services. The first link goes to a semi-annual report, and the third link goes to the Capital Projects Liaison Christie Lawrence. This current plan will also be presented to Council as we progress. Additional resources for FY25 Proposed Budget available at <http://www.savannahga.gov/budget>. For a print version that is available to view in person please visit the Clerk of Council's Office in City Hall, the Bull Street Library, or West Chatham Library. Individuals may also visit the active capital site at <https://savannahga.gov/2450/Capital-Projects-Management>. Citizens may submit inquiries to budgetga@savannahga.gov.

Before opening the floor for questions Mayor Johnson thanked City Manager Melder and the Budget Team. He clarified that the Clerk's Office has temporarily moved from the 1st floor to the 4th floor. He stated that although the City has had significant success in receiving federal funds they are not part of the general funds but are capital funds that are *capital specific* therefore, we are prohibited from using them to balance the budget. The Mayor had two issues- building up our bonding ability which should be used to create opportunities and move projects along. Secondly, he stated that we have managed project management in-house in the past and feels that it a better use of our time and resources to move away form that practice especially with the 271 active projects that we currently have. He noted that the current City Council is very aggressive (with a capital "A") and expects to see movement on these projects. He asked that the City Manager keep that in consideration.

City Manager Melder shared that he completely agrees and that they are in the final stages of acquiring a company for project management services.

The Mayor asked if there were any questions from Council and addressed Ald. Wilder-Bryan.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked how we determine what the money can or cannot be used for. Also how do we determine what can be used in the interfund?

City Manager Melder responded by explaining that the interfund budget line is an internal budget accounting code. He used the example of Fire or Police using certain services and applying a formula to repay those services from a department account. We want departments to know how much it costs to do their work even if the City is supplying some of those services.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked if there was a specific timeline or if it was interest-bearing if we loan within the funds.

Sansia Joseph-Jarvis explained that there was no time attached but the Budget Team looks at it for that full year of services. The funds are paid for through the interfund transfer.

Ald. Bell asked about the 1.5M increase in internal services and a 51.3 decrease in interfund transfers. She wondered if security services was paid for from the fund. Ms. Jarvis agreed and explained that for efficiency reasons it would be beneficial to have the general fund managed by Risk Management Director, Bryan Hollis and can be redistributed accordingly to each of our funds within the city. Ald. Bell recalled something called revolving funds and thought that the process sounded like the costs are split over the operating departments.

City Manager Melder referred to the security costs specifically and said that they found that it was beneficial to the taxpayer and the operations to process it as one big operation and RFP. He also said that because it was similar to departments like Fleet, IT, and other internal services, the decision was made to pull it into the transfer fund and be able to divvy up the costs.

Melissa Carter added that Ald. Bell had recalled correctly that we did have the internal allocation service. She stated that basically this is a change in budgeting philosophy - over time our costs for security services has increased especially as we brought more facilities online as well as the cost to properly outfit security plans in our facilities.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked the team for their presentation and had several questions. She inquired whether the City had anything in the fund in reference to the hurricane.

City Manager Melder said that there is a plan for disaster expenses in 2025; there are contracts and reserves that are able to pay for them if needed. In FY2024 we incurred significant costs due to the debris collection from tropical storms and hurricanes. However, all of that will be 100% reimbursable from the federal government because of the disaster declaration that the president made for our area.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked what the other 6% means? Sansia Joseph-Jarvis shared that "other" is usually for payments. For example, vehicles, computers are all considered "other" and have nothing to do with personnel costs.

Ald. Miller Blakey also asked where the 271 active projects can be found in the budget book. Victoria Keller suggested referring to the websites to view the semi-annual update that will have all the active projects listed. Ald. Miller Blakely asked the team to explain what is the active capital ledger balance for Sanitation at 1% (which is \$3M of the pie chart). Victoria Keller stated that Sanitation does not have a lot of capital expenses at this time and the City has postponed those capital investments to keep rates lower for customers. Ald. Miller Blakely wanted to know where the Fiscal 25 details of the 78 projects can be found. Victoria Keller responded that they are shown in the table of contents; each of them have a marker and a description of each fund. Mayor Johnson stated that they be found on pages 293, 295, and 297. City Manager Melder said that following page 297 to the end of the book (page 385), each of those pages describe in detail each capital project that is being funded.

Ald. Lanier thanked Sansia Joseph-Jarvis for her portion of the presentation and referred to the general fund expenses about drainage increase. City Manager Melder said that we have put revenue growth from the millage rate into both years. Ald. Lanier wondered if that was the reason we had an increase in the drainage expenses. City Manager Melder added that in the summer of 2023 we had \$7M and a little less in 2024. All of this went to the Stormwater Fund and that is what is accounting for those increases. Ald. Lanier asked about facility space as they talked about the capital improvement plan and wanted to know if we would see these options come to us in the form of a workshop or how to get involved in the process.

City Manager Melder stated that 2025 is going to be a big year for municipal space planning. There are many things that the City needs to do and the things that they want to do will be brought forward in a workshop. We need to expand the public safety services out west and making a plan for our leased police precincts and get out of some of our leased spaces. There is also a need for general municipal office spaces. The Coastal Georgia Center at some point will no longer be available to the City of Savannah. Those are a few of the ideas that will be brought before Council in the future,

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz asked about the hurricane fund and whether or not those reimbursement funds will be moved over to FY25? City Manager Melder said that those funds that we incurred will be applied to FY24 - the year that we incurred the expense. The services are paid for up front and the federal government reimburses us back- due to the disaster declaration/FEMA and we apply that in our accounting to FY24. The projections are that our revenues will reach up to \$615M for the current year and \$601M for FY25 (including the reimbursement from the federal government).

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the ladies of the budget team for doing a good job as well as Mrs. Carter for her leadership. She stated that she believes that when there are great leaders, leaders don't like just to be leaders themselves and just move on individually, but great leaders like to produce leaders themselves. With a proposed budget of \$602M she asked if someone could expand on the economic growth piece.

City Manager Melder stated that our needs, expenses, and revenues are all tied to our economy - specifically to our local economy (how well our residents and businesses are doing). This also dictates whether we are growing. For example, new growth, new businesses being built, new homes being built property, old properties being restored will cause the valuations of those properties to go up. \$109M is projected for FY25 in property tax revenue. In addition, a significant amount of revenue comes from sales tax. The more people who are visiting Savannah or the more money local residents have to spend, the more sales tax we will have to collect.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz asked, when do we start considering recommendations for SPLOST 8? City Manager Melder said very soon, especially if we want SPLOST 8 on the ballot. He stated that in early 2025 they would begin to develop that list. Past and current administrations have discussed the SPLOST dollars. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz said that her big thing is drainage and Stormwater, and having the focus of our thoughts be on drainage and stormwater.

Mayor Johnson stated that SPLOST goes beyond being an administrative feat, it's also a political feat. It has to pass by the majority of voters in this country. He thanked everyone including the budget team.

[2. Daffin Park Signature Playground](#)

[Exhibit 1: Signature Playground Concept_Council.pptx](#)

Daffin Park Signature Park

Mayor Johnson said that the City Manager had something exciting to discuss. Instead of Recreation Department he suggested naming it the *Department of Fun*. This would help to keep everyone engaged into what it's really about.

City Manager Melder spoke about what is in the capital budget for the recreation department and Re-Imagine for FY25 and beyond. He introduced Chief Taffanye Young and Director Roberts to share a presentation.

Chief Young stated that Recreation Re-Imagine was conceived in 2021 and after much research and surveys to determine why citizens were not coming to the facilities, they presented at a City Council meeting and a budget was approved. Numerous improvements were made to playgrounds, basketball courts, tennis courts, pool resurfacing, community centers, new play spaces, etc. Early on they talked about reimagining what a playground would look like in Savannah. The Chief shared some examples of what that looked like across the country. They received some funding for a "signature playground" which means it has the city's autograph and a distinguishing style. She stated that a signature playground is unique because it serves the folks who live in Savannah. Her team noticed that a place that's inclusive was missing from our playgrounds. It is rare to find a playground that has equipment that every child regardless of their physical ability can enjoy. Typically young people with special needs have to use a separate play area or sit and watch other children have fun. The decision was made to use Daffin Park which has a large area available for a park that size, plus it is in a key location and easily identifiable. It also has interior roads which allow for drop-off and pick-up. They are hoping that it will be a place to bring the community back out. Recreation is not only about physical health, but social health as well.

Chief Young turned the presentation over to Mr. Roberts. He thanked the Mayor and City Council for the opportunity to present this exciting project that will enhance the recreation landscape in the City of Savannah. The signature playground will be a milestone project of the city's reimagined initiative which focuses on rethinking how recreation is delivered in Savannah with an emphasis on enriching the lives of residents and guests by providing high quality recreation experiences. Mr. Roberts outlined the details of the new playground and some of the features/benefits of the GameTime equipment. The city's first signature playground will be more than just a place to play - it will be a destination that exemplifies innovation, inclusivity, and excellence in recreational design. Play Core as the parent company of GameTime utilizes recreation industry best practices, as well as research to help develop products and play-based design. The specialized equipment qualifies the park as a national demonstration site. This will promote physical activity, support healthier lifestyles, and address childhood obesity. The signature playground will also set a new standard for inclusivity and reflect our commitment to all children regardless of ability where all can participate in meaningful play. There will be zones designed for interaction between children with and without disabilities. Mr. Roberts asked the big question, "what will it look like"? This will be the city's first large-scale, multi-zone inclusive playground. The signature playground will be located at the northwest corner at Daffin Park. The slide show and video will show an overview of the concept of the park. Some of the other

playground features are: Fully ADA compliant surfacing, quiet time and storytelling zone, integrated musical components, a full fenced play area with gated entry, and public restrooms with adult changing tables.

Following the video a Council Member said, "that's awesome" and Mr. Roberts gave the thumbs up sign. He stated that the signature playground project not only elevates our park and recreation offerings, but also showcases the city as a leader in innovative and inclusive design and it's a chance to make a lasting impact in our community and beyond.

The project is expected to take about 9 months to complete with an anticipated completion date in Fall 2025. Mr. Roberts asked if there were any questions.

City Manager Melder thanked the team for the presentation and stated that there is a contract on the agenda later in the afternoon regarding the construction of the signature playground. The team also held an onsite engagement for the community that some of the Council Members attended.

The Mayor stated that he wanted to lift up two things: 1) In saying that Savannah will be a safe, environmentally healthy and economically thriving community for all, everyone is different and we should still strive to find ways to be inclusive. This is a big way of doing that. He thanked the team for their vision. 2) Who's going to stop him from going and enjoying the park (kidding)? He stated that they will have problems with the adults enjoying the park as much as the kids!

Ald. Leggett exclaimed, "Nick that was beautiful" and thanked him also for the event that they had onsite. He stated that he liked the circus theme and that it will be an awesome space for everybody to go out and have fun. He had a question stemming from an incident where a child slipped and had fallen into the lake and asked if there was anything to address the lake area.

Mr. Roberts responded by saying that the entire playground will be fenced around. The park will be a staffed park with security cameras to help deter some of those issues. "If you fund it, I will build it" was his response to Ald. Leggett and there was laughter in the room. He then recognized and gave credit to his staff who have worked very hard over the last year including Ricky Allison, Operations Manager and Peter Maierhofer, Assistant Director on the Community Services side.

Ald. Leggett thanked the team for building all of these different avenues for our children and as a championship football coach he has to make sure the kids start off in a great place.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan thanked them for a really awesome presentation and said that it warms her heart and she is happy to share the great news about Daffin Park with the alderman from the 4th district. She asked if the white building in the photos would be available as a rental space for parties or is where quiet time will be.

Mr. Roberts responded that the white building will be the restroom building and is a key feature that is missing at the park.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan also asked about the public restrooms with the adult changing tables feature. Chief Young responded to this by saying that as children grow, especially those that are wheelchair bound, they need a larger area for changing. Chief Young also shared that a parent who was at the open house was so excited that this feature would be available. The parent shared that it was a rarity and it makes it almost impossible for parents whose children are wheelchair bound to take them anywhere, as most facilities don't accommodate that. Chief Young said that they are very excited to be able to offer that.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that she has been saying for the past 4 years that it's the little things that mean so much to our citizens - they are willing to wait for larger things. She said, "that's good government" and thanked the Chief for listening to that parent.

Ald. Palumbo thanked the team for their incredible work on the project and he is very proud of it. Even though it has a fence, it is truly *boundless*. Daffin Park is the people's park where everyone can come and enjoy. He hopes that this park becomes a model for each district. Ald. Palumbo also stated that the top feedback they received is for an adult playground. His young nieces give the playground their seal of approval.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked the team for the presentation and for making this come to fruition. When she was first elected, recreation was her main concern and commented that they had done a phenomenal job. As an At-Large representative she is concerned that the signature park is over at Daffin Park. She asked whether Forsyth Park had the same capabilities on that playground as there are at Daffin Park, and how can we make Forsyth Park almost the same as what Daffin Park is going to be like, and what about the westside of Savannah and Highlands. She confirmed that the signature park cost is \$1.1M and asked what could we do to put the same into Forsyth Park and Highlands.

City Manager Melder stated that we are calling it a signature park is not because it's going to be the only one but mark what we want to be building and providing for all of our communities in the future.

It's creating a new standard for how we want to think. There is a certain scale that Daffin has that can accommodate a large structure like this; the same is true for other parks as well. Playgrounds are important but so are courts, community centers, gymnasiums, and other types of investments. It's creating a new standard for how we want our amenities to serve everyone.

Ald. Miller Blakely understood that but wanted to know how soon the park could be set up at the other locations and what could be done to bring Forsyth Park to the same level. \$1.1M is not a lot of money for our city and said that she was sure we could find the funds to upgrade Forsyth Park (put something like this in the Highlands and also West Savannah).

The Mayor responded that Recreation Re-Imagined is like a toddler and is evolving and finding its legs in terms of being able to provide innovative spaces in areas. Every area doesn't need, want, or deserve the same amenity. They have to be able to find ways of finding what different neighborhoods need and based upon available size and what the residents want and need. He feels that the administration should continue to fund as things come to them. In looking at the Westside he agreed with Ald. Palumbo in that even though this is a city-wide amenity District 4 doesn't have a community center, nor a gym. In District 1 we opened up a community center and a gym within the same year. Staff has to continue to be out working in those communities finding out what their desires are and their wishes for their community. Some of the citizens are regulars at City Council meetings who come forward with ideas and community input and we should be ready to fund them. The Mayor further agreed that \$1.1M in the grand scheme of things is not a huge amount of money, but we should allow our professionals to determine what those needs are and he hopes to have Ald. Miller Blakely's support in funding them.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated to the Mayor that if we build it they will come (it's all about equity). He responded that if we build it with their support they will love it.

Ald. Bell thanked Chief Taffanye and Director Nick. She stated that this is awesome and a great beginning. Like her colleague she is concerned about the entire city too but is willing to see this first one built, giving the community an opportunity to see it. She concurred with Nick when he said that recreation facilities were built for our residents of the community and the residents need to be a part of the decision-making process when it comes to what is placed in their neighborhoods. It is beautiful! Let's plan to expand this kind of thing to other parts of the city.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked Chief Young, Director Roberts, the City Manager, and Ald. Palumbo on his oversight on this and everyone. She said that she sees it as a city-wide playground. The other key feature that caught her eye was the adaptive swing seats including the multi-generational dual swings to encourage families to play together.

Director Roberts shared that the swing has seats on both sides that can be pushed by a parent or caregiver while the child is on the other side. The team wanted to offer something unique and different from what is currently out there.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that this was innovative and puts us, the City of Savannah, as a leader. She questioned the type of turf that will be used especially as kids fall during play as well as maintaining the current colors.

Director Roberts responded that the final selection of the color palette for all of the equipment has not been made yet. The signature park turf will be a poured-in-place rubberized surface that is a soft material. It drains well and is low maintenance vs. mulch which requires more upkeep.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz continued on that same subject with regard to the other playgrounds within the City of Savannah as well as with the turf and safety situation, would we look to transfer out the mulch?

Director Roberts stated that yes, they had already begun the process earlier in the year and changed the mulch to engineered wood fiber (which becomes a more stable ADA compliant surfacing).

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz's last concern was for benches at the park for individuals who want to sit and watch the children around the spaces. Director Roberts shared that there will be adequate seating that was not shown in this particular plan. The seating will be in shaded areas at the picnic tables as well as around the entire property in areas in the beautifully shaded tree canopy. She shared her excitement and credited them with a good job.

Ald. Lanier said she loved it and thanked them for the presentation. She addressed City Manager Melder and said that we will want it in every area of the city and continue to support these signature type playgrounds. "Ford" was supposed to be the equivalent of that type of area on the Westside and we will continue to have those conversions. She stated to Nick that we will also want to be sure to regulate the water around the splash pads. Nick replied that the issue has been worked out for next spring. Finally, she asked what the weight limit is for the zipline.

Director Roberts smiled and stated that he did not know off the top of his head but he will definitely check into that. She said that her grandson would love it and congratulated them on a great job.

Mayor Johnson's final question was regarding Savannah's sometimes very challenging weather and how it affects thick surfaces, would we have to come back in a year or two to replace elements of the wear and tear? What is the warranty situation? And how do we talk about the maintenance of it?

City Manager Melder began by saying that this was a helpful question. We have to account for the recurring dollars that we need to maintain and repair those capital improvements. While \$1.2M may sound like a small sliver of money and is especially challenging within a finite budget.

Director Roberts said that the contract includes a 2-year warranty on labor, 10 years on the equipment and for servicing it is generally an 8-year usage; a lot of it is based upon traffic.

Mayor Johnson said kids are bigger now than they used to be. He speaks at middle school and high schools with kids and saw 12 yr. olds and 13 yr. olds that are larger than some adults. We have to account for the fact that someone might actually meet the age requirement but also having the bulk may make this a little challenging.

Chief Young stated that there will be signage throughout the park at each one of the zones that will clarify height limits, weight limits, etc. Safety information will also be available as you enter the park.

Mayor Johnson thanked them again and thanked City Manager Melder for supporting our vision for fun. He also noted that on behalf of Council let's find the best practices and see how we can make them work for Savannah.

Lastly, Chief Young clarified by saying that the item on the agenda for \$1.1M was for the playground equipment and the play surface. There will be other agenda items coming with additional allocations for fencing, restrooms, etc. in the 2025 Budget.

The presentation was completed and the Mayor stated that there would be no Executive Session in lieu of the Thanksgiving holiday (per the City Attorney and City Manager).

The meeting was adjourned until 2 p.m. The Council Members then gathered for a photo.

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

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

There was no action taken during the Workshop.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop/executive session at **12:46 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://savannahgovtv.viebit.com/player.php?hash=BlhqwivadzGpN5w>