



**SEPTEMBER 26, 2024 12:00 p.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 **12:00 p.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.

Mayor Johnson stated we are anticipating a storm event. He asked City Manager Melder to give a high-level update regarding the anticipated weather events of Hurricane Helene. The City Manager indicated our area anticipates increased chance of tornado activity, tropical storm force winds, and large rain bands. The city's crews are out preparing and addressing street flooding. They will continue to be out all night and all day, as the storm passes.

Mayor Johnson thanked the City Manager, Team Savannah, and the sanitation and recycling folks who are out making it happen.

**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. Major Federal Grants and Congressionally Directed Spending Update](#)

Mayor Johnson introduced the discussion by speaking to the great opportunities on the state and federal levels, due to our investments, with arming the City Manager and Team Savannah to play big. It has paid big dividends for us. He thanked staff for their leadership.

City Manager Melder spoke to members of Council about state and federal grant capture initiatives. He indicated the presentation will include what they have been able to secure and where they hope to bring that program, as well as where more state and federal dollars can be brought into Savannah to help with big infrastructure initiatives, like stormwater, safe streets for all, and housing. He asked Chief Planning & Economic Development Officer Faye DiMassimo and Interim Chief of Information and Public Affairs Joe Shearouse to come-up and make the presentation. He further stated our ability to pull down these large grants, especially from the federal government, is the result of many different things. The first is leadership and heightened visibility this Council provides the City, both in Atlanta and Washington, D.C. Another big part is Team Savannah, the expertise we have and the expertise we have brought in, thereby deepening our bench. We are increasing our grant writing capability and we are making sure we have projects that are shovel ready and on the shelf. We also rely on our community partners to help us. The same recipe that brings federal dollars helps us on the state level, like the One Georgia Grant, and the recent low-income housing tax credit award for our Fairgrounds project. Then the City Manager turned the presentation over to Faye and Joe to make the PowerPoint presentation on file in the Clerk of Council's office.

Mayor Johnson thanked the City Manager, Mr. Shearouse, Ms. DiMassimo, and city partners Mr. Andrew "Drew" Young from US Senator Warnock's office and Ms. Christian Shellman from US Senator Ossoff's office. There are two sides to this work, building the relationships and leveraging the relationships. We have to have good projects that make sense. Mayor Johnson advised that when he is advocating in D.C. or Atlanta, it makes it easy for him when we have projects that are ready to go. When US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg called him regarding the latest grant, he called the City Manager because no matter how competitive the funding opportunities, the Secretary was pleased with Savannah's plan. That's the work that makes the rubber meet the road. Sometimes we need to hop in a plane and go to be in these meetings and hearings and to create opportunities.

Ald. Palumbo congratulated the team on bringing home to Savannah \$50 million within a two-three year span. It is a systems approach and takes an enormous amount of hard work, partnership, and connections on both the political and governance side to make things work. He congratulated Mr. Shearouse and Ms. DiMassimo who already has assisted within a months time, going after the SMART Grant, which was also received by Chatham Area Transit (CAT), and the ATIIP Grant. He was going to ask what's the next big one we are going to go after, but he sees that they already have that going in motion.

Mayor Johnson added that are more opportunities to have skin in the game. Sometimes we will asked by the City Manager to have local investments in order to go after federal dollars. The City Manager responded with examples, like the SPLOST funds and the BRIC grant.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked whether we have received all of the ARPA funds. The City Manager responded yes, and all of the funding has been allocated. Regarding Safe Streets for All, she asked how they decided which three city council districts would be getting this award and which three districts are impacted. The City Manager and Ms. DiMassimo explained the entire 37th Street Corridor was identified as the most unsafe corridor (incidents and fatalities) which spans districts one, two, and three. Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated she would have liked to see what the plan was going to be, the districts, neighborhoods, and 15 intersections identified on the map.

Ald. Bell thanked everyone and expressed a concern regarding engagement. She would like to see our citizens as excited as we are about receiving these funds and the transformation coming to the neighborhoods, like the flyover coming down. She asked if we are thinking about how we can engage/inform citizens, other than what we are already doing. In attending the recent forums, hardly nobody is there. More staff appear to be attending than citizens. While she advised that she does not have the answers, maybe some flyers can be distributed. The City Manager responded regarding authentic community engagement opportunities in a more meaningful way. Mr. Shearouse added there are opportunities to engage post-award to capitalize on the velocity of the award through constant communication, with project advisory committees.

Ald. Lanier thanked them for the report and presentation. Then she asked if ARPA is the only grant that is exhausted. The City Manager responded by explaining how ARPA worked in 2021 and 2022. He advised he has a nice graphic on those funds and he will be happy to share it. Ald. Lanier stated it will be great to get something on how those funds were spent and where. With more emphasis on transportation, we have a huge need in the Woodville area, like recent conversations regarding a bypass road due to the negative impact on those communities resulting from the traffic. Ald. Lanier stated she would like to see the names of our streets in the City of Savannah to be spelled correctly. Regarding the involvement and participation of the Tide to Town project engagements, she did not

support what the contractor came to the table with. It is going to be essential that we hire and engage with people who are sensitive to how to work with marginalized people. We are not doing a good job of holding meetings where people can easily attend, without having to travel away from their (threatened) areas to engage in these meetings. Experience, training, and knowledge is needed on how you work with certain demographic communities. Equity has been identified to be a foundational principle and she needs that.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the City Manager for his leadership, and Ms. DiMassimo and Mr. Shearouse for taking this to another level. She asked if there is a stipulation required for community engagement. The City Manager responded with examples of where this is required and he named other activities, even when it is not required, but he would still like to roll out engagement opportunities. Regarding leveraging and capitalizing, Dr. Shabazz asked about the move-in ready homes project. Mr. Shearouse described the project in more detail. Following his explanation, Dr. Shabazz stated due to our low housing inventory, this is going to be absolutely wonderful for our city and reduce blight among existing structures. On the reconnecting communities slide, Dr. Shabazz asked for an explanation of the \$720K for updating IMR (Interchange Modification Report). Ms. DiMassimo provided an explanation of IMR as an in-depth traffic analysis that helps GDOT. Further, this project brings restoration and re-creation, as well as an economic development opportunity. Dr. Shabazz also thanked Mr. Young from US Senator Warnock's office, Ms. Shellman from US Senator Ossoff's office, Matt from Congressman Carter's office, and Mayor Johnson for representing the City of Savannah.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked them for the presentation. She asked what is being put back (businesses) when the flyover comes down. Regarding Safe Streets for All, she asked for the 15 intersection improvements (Ogeechee Rd, Bulloch St, MLK Jr, Montgomery St, Barnard St, Whitaker St, Bull St, Drayton St, Abercorn St, Habersham St, Price St, E. Broad St, Paulsen St, Harmon St, Waters Ave and down to Bee Rd), the five different neighborhoods (Live Oak, Midtown, Thomas Square, Metropolitan, and Cuyler-Brownsville), and the three city council districts (1st, 2nd, 3rd). Regarding the move-in ready homes project, she would like to see some veterans get assistance wherever possible. Regarding Solar for All, Ald. Miller Blakely asked if the city has assisted with any households. Ms. DiMassimo advised she will get her a list and the grant provides solar to 6000 residential rooftops, provide 14,000 additional homes with affordable energy, expanded electricity discounts, and Georgia Power 65+ senior discounts (\$33.50). For persons wanting to take advantage of this program, Ms. DiMassimo stated the sustainability staff is working on a program now to make sure outreach occurs for eligibility and participation. Ald. Miller Blakely requested that information to put it out into the community.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated there is an apartment complex in the 3rd district, Alhambra, who were the first to receive solar energy, and they say their electricity bills have dropped significantly.

Ald. Palumbo congratulated Ald. Wilder-Bryan, this City Council, and the Office of Sustainability who has been so successful, they keep being promoted out. The formula we launched in March 2020 to bring solar energy into our city facilities was exported to a pilot program called Georgia Bright. The program then went statewide and received a federal grant, a remarkable success program we should all be proud of.

Mayor Johnson announced there is no executive session, and for any questions regarding the agenda, he asked council members to get with the City Manager.

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

No executive session was needed or held.

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

Mayor Johnson asked members of the City Council to get with the City Manager regarding any agenda items.

There was no action taken during the Workshop.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop at **12:59 p.m.**

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=BlhqwiVadzGpN5wH>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

**Date Minutes Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

