



**FEBRUARY 13, 2025 - 4:30 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 **4:36 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, and he announced that there was no action taken during the executive session which was held immediately prior regarding litigation and personnel.

**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. 2024 Public Safety Review & 2025 Public Safety Outlook](#)

The Mayor called the Council Workshop to order, and stated that the whole community approach as it related to law enforcement is best. In public safety it is important to invest in the best people and the best of everything. The Council believes that having the best people on the streets (law enforcement) leads to lower crime rates overall and life-saving activities would go up.

The City Manager introduced the executive team at the City Police Department: Chief Gunther, Assistant Chief Adams, and Assistant Chief Gavin. Their team conducted a presentation on 2024 Public Safety Review and 2025 Public Safety Outlook.

City Manager Melder expressed that he was glad to see a year like 2024 in terms of crime reduction. He shared that it is a difficult job and only a very few people decide to do it.

Mayor Johnson stated that the news about the crime rate was good but that he would not be satisfied until we have a day where we have "no crime and no longer need police". There is no such thing as community policing; the police are the community and the community are the police. He urged Council to continue to make those investments and maintain millage rates to be able to reinvest back into police services. He thanked the Chiefs for their leadership as well.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated that she was very proud and happy that the Police Department reflects the city's demographics in the hiring of more female officers, making the City higher than the national average. She commented that the partnership with the SIP (Savannah Impact Program) and the District Attorney's office for an expungement of records was a phenomenal success and thanked the department and Shalena Cook Jones. She also extended her many thanks to the mental health individuals. She asked about the partnership for the young ladies with SIP and wondered if there is a program for men.

Asst. Chief D. Adams responded that the men's program would be starting in March and that they have partnered with the STEM Academy and Hubert Middle School. The consistent feedback from the community has been that they want to see more engagement with the youth.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan stated that she was very proud of what the department was doing. She asked about the process for the mental health unit; when does the behavioral unit get involved? How quickly can a person get on to the mental health docket and get out of the county jail? How is the partnership with the public in getting the ring cameras and any related investigations?

Assistant Chief Gavin stated that they do respond to mental health situations and conduct the follow-ups in cases where there is a mental health component. The department also utilizes some of the resources from The Front Porch, as well as the Behavioral Health Crisis Center (especially before a case can become a police or arrest issue). Having a clinician on hand will help to speed up the process.

Ald. Lanier thanked the team for their presentation and congratulated them on a job well done. She noticed that in some areas crime has been trending downwards but in terms of theft it has been trending upwards. She believes that the Council should continue to maintain their investment but what tweaks can be done for increases (numbers related to economics: poverty, education, home and family structure). It will be like turning knobs - things that are working we can turn up, and things that are not, we need to keep the fire burning at that level.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked the Chiefs for their presentation and is glad to hear that there are decreases in issues with public safety. She asked the Chiefs what they thought causes the increases; specifically theft from vehicles being such a large number. She also appreciated the messaging and advertising to the public about locking vehicle doors.

Chief Gunther replied that they are crimes of opportunity; especially leaving vehicle doors unlocked and leaving items visible on seats. The police department consistently takes the opportunity to address the public whenever possible.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz was especially appreciative of having an addition to the mental health team - she has seen what they can do in action. Mental health has taken a front seat since Covid and she is glad that the City is doing something about it and are working together to touch citizens.

Ald. Bell thanked SPD for their hard work. She stated that the benefit of investing in the police department has yielded positive results. The value that the community has played in the results has improved the relationship between the police department and the community.

Ald. Palumbo congratulated SPD on a great presentation. He can see that morale is higher and there is stability in the leadership and command staff. He is encouraged that resources will aid in returning officers to police mounted patrols and the bicycle unit. Both of these have added a

positive impact on the community. He is also looking forward to seeing the progress of Police HQ. Council's job is to continue to invest resources in PD's efforts.

Ald. Purtee humourously said that he would not be biased. He thanked them for their service, understanding that they have the hardest and best job. He shared that people love the Police Athletic/Activities League (PALs Program) and roll call in the streets, which has led to great partnerships and community engagement. We would never be able to pay public safety officers what they are worth because a price cannot be placed on that, but we can try to make it as attractive as possible.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked to recognize the ONSE (Office of Neighborhood Safety & Engagement) group.

Mayor Johnson said let's be better and be stronger and thanked them for their presentation.

City Manager Melder welcomed the Savannah Fire Department team to present, led by Chief E. Kitchen, Deputy Chief W. Handy (absent due to bereavement), Assistant Chief J. McCutchen, and Assistant Chief S. Frazier. The presentation was titled Savannah Fire Department FY24 Annual Review.

Mayor Johnson thanked the Chiefs for their presentation. He stated that we are in the fire business but have been responding to more EMS calls. We need to have a courageous conversation with our providers of EMS because we are taking on more of the work of emergency medical vs. fire calls. The Mayor also had continued concerns about E-911 and that calls are being answered and dispatched quickly.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan inquired about the property on Eisenhower being equipped to use as a training facility for the department. She also asked about overtime management and suggested possibly using other departments programming. Chief Kitchen replied that there are too many combinations rather than the typical 40 hour work schedule that make it unable to work for their department.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked about Camp Inflamm (men) and Camp Ignite (women); and asked about the process of submitting applications. The age limit for both camps is aged 14 -20 years old with priority for citizens of Savannah.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz commented on the logo with the female firefighter inside was designed by the fire department. She appreciated the solid data on the numbers of the key indicators. The data shows the current 92% of response time within 4 minutes but to get to 100%, the response time must be lowered. She believes that the Hampstead Public Safety Facility will help the entire team reach that goal. She thanked them for all of the great work that they are doing.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan asked the team about inclusion, the hiring practices and application process of the fire department. Chief Kitchen responded that you can have misdemeanors and felonies as long as the felonies are non-violent.

Mayor Johnson put his HR hat on and stated that Georgia is an employment at-will state and that we do not generally engage in contracts. There is a singular contract and a great relationship with firefighters via IAFF. Although the City is not required to have one it is done to maintain the opportunity to remain engaged with the department.

Ald. Lanier thanked them for the presentation and commended them on setting a high standard and high achievements. She is also proud that they mentioned accreditation and maintaining that value for the City.

City Manager Melder shared that public safety is a whole city approach with numerous departments being involved. The Community Services Department are involved with young people who are most at-risk of violent crimes. The Community Services team's presentation covered an annual review of 2024 and the upcoming 2025 plan. The main presenter was Chief Taffanye Williams and the members of her team were: Isaac Felton, Marco George, Timothy Wright, Kaylee Heard, Lorrell White, and newest member Jimmie Johnson from Tennessee (previously led the Group Violence Intervention Activity under the City of Memphis).

The department mainly works through partners and offering programs. Future plans are to create a public dashboard to show the outcomes of the work being done.

Mayor Johnson stated that all of our superheroes don't wear uniforms which sends a message to criminals that we have a zero tolerance policy. He will continue to stress the importance of building relationships.

Ald. Miller Blakely personally thanked and congratulated Mr. Felton and Mr. George, the entire team and welcomed the newest member, Mr. Johnson. She stated that when the Mayor announced the Top Ten Most Wanted the crime rate decreased.

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

[3. City Manager's Update](#)

There was no action taken during the Workshop.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop at **6:18 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>

