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**JANUARY 26, 2023, 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 4:30 p.m. Mayor Johnson recognized Alderman Purtee to offer a prayer.

**PRESENT:**

Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, Presiding  
Alderwoman Kesha Gibson-Carter, 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  
Alderman Nick Palumbo, District 4, Vice-Chairman  
Alderwoman Dr. Estella Edwards Shabazz, District 5, Mayor Pro-Tem  
Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

**ALSO, PRESENT:**

City Manager Joseph A. Melder  
Chief of Staff Daphanie Williams  
City Attorney Bates Lovett  
Clerk of Council Mark Massey  
Deputy Clerk of Council Margaret Fox

**Workshop Agenda Items**

[1. Public Safety Update.](#)

[Exhibit 1: Savannah Police Department Public Safety Update.pptx](#)

[Exhibit 2: Savannah Fire Department Public Safety Update.pptx](#)

[Exhibit 3: Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement Update.pptx](#)

Mayor Johnson welcomed all in attendance and to those watching. He expressed concern for the events in Memphis as it relates to police actions.

Mayor Johnson introduced City Manager Melder for the annual public safety update. Mr. Melder indicated there will be three presentations: Savannah Police Department, Chief Lenny Gunther; Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (ONES), Director John Bush; and Savannah Fire Department, Chief Elzie Kitchen.

Following the presentation there were questions and comments from Members of Council:

- Alderman Purtee asked what attributed to the increase in crime, and the largest challenge facing the police department. Chief Gunther indicated different factors effect increases in crime: mainly access to guns, auto thefts with unlocked vehicles and increased activity by residents since COVID relaxed. Vacancies are the largest challenges for the department. Alderman Purtee expressed his appreciation for the behavioral health unit and is hopeful the unit can be increased.
- Alderwoman Miller Blakely expressed her thanks to the City Manager and the police department for hearing Council Members request/concerns. She asked Chief Gunther if the behavioral unit will work on weekends (yes). She asked if the Cadet Program participates will receive pay (the decision for pay is in conversation).
- Alderwoman Gibson-Carter noticed an increase in rapes and sexual assaults and asked Chief Gunther for the number of arrests (Chief Gunther will provide the data to Alderwoman Gibson-Carter & Council). In regards to the alcohol ordinance, she would like the City to take a more responsible position with allowing an increase in bars and establishments serving alcohol. She requested the City take more accountability measures. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter expressed concern for the number of fire incidents in District 2 and she asked if it was because of the student population. She asked Chief Gunther if there is similar response data (Chief Gunther will get the stats to Council). Alderwoman Gibson-Carter stated she noticed a (positive) shift in morale in the police department when Chief Gunther took office, but the number of police vacancies should be addressed due to the number of students and tourists in the downtown area. She suggested more aggressive recruitment and looking at retirees or any officers who have recently left the City for other employment. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter expressed concern for: speed detectors in school zones ticketing outside of school hours; youth selling water at intersections; easier access to police reports by the public; and diversity while recruiting for the fire department.
- Alderman Palumbo expressed thanks to Mr. Bush on the great job the ONES' office has done in the community. He asked Chief Gunther if there was an increase in applications with the increase in salary and the perks (sign-on bonus, vehicle and retention bonuses) for new police officers (yes). Alderman Palumbo expressed an interest in the Real-Time Crime Center. Chief Gunther shared the plans for the Center and how useful the information will be for officers.
- Mayor Johnson expressed that he is looking at the aggregate and appreciating what did not happen. The officers are doing a lot of good work in the community. He thanked Mr. Bush, Chief Gunther and Chief Kitchen for all the work their departments contribute to the City.
- Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz expressed that she noticed the positive atmosphere in the room. The leadership in public safety is phenomenal. She gave special thanks to Mr. Bush for his community work with youth. She asked Chief Gunther about the areas of the shot spotter (shot spotters are spread everywhere). Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz expressed thanks for the behavioral health unit, given the pandemic crisis and the residents and staff needing support. She encouraged the City Manager to keep going with the public safety and public health efforts in keeping the City safe.
- Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan asked Chief Gunther if the cold case unit will be reopened. Chief Gunther indicated the cold case unit is still operating and advertised for two new positions, this will make a total of six in the unit (he will send Council stats on the cases). She asked Chief Kitchen for any data on the elderly population and fires (Chief Kitchen will send Council the data).
- Alderman Leggett asked Chief Gunther for the roll-out date for dashboards for officers. He would like to share the information with neighborhood associations. The Savannah Impact Program will roll-out in the next couple days and there will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Waters Avenue Streetscape, both events will benefit the community. Alderman Leggett expressed appreciation to ONES Program Coordinator Isaac Felton for inviting him to have conversations with young men concerning life choices, the young men took the oath to be gun free. The ONES program is an opportunity to interact with community youth.

- As the City leverages technology with the use of cameras, Alderwoman Lanier asked Chief Gunther to add the lights, so the cameras and lights will work hand-in-hand. She thanked Chief Gunther for the work completed in the Cuyler-Brownsville area. Alderwoman Lanier asked Chief Gunther if the police department was working with the face recognition technology (no). She recommended some focus on traffic calming as residents complain of increased traffic on the Westside with trucks and traffic. Chief Gunther uses complaint data to address traffic issues and there are plans to increase the traffic unit. Alderwoman Lanier asked City Manager Melder if more speed detectors could be placed in communities. City Manager Melder indicated the traffic engineering department has budgeted for more detectors. Alderwoman Lanier asked Chief Kitchen when the CPR Program is initiated, please include Council for the opportunity to participate. She recommended Mr. Bush change the wording 'keeping youth safe, alive and out of jail'. The motto has a low expectation/vibration. A more upbeat or inspirational motto, such as 'guiding youth from risks to rewards', would be more positive. Alderwoman Lanier asked Chief Gunther about the number of homicides so far this year (0), last year at this time (2). City Manager Melder agreed with Alderwoman Lanier concerning the ONES motto that the City wants to see the youth thriving and not arrested.

Mayor Johnson thanked all the presenters, City Manager Melder and staff. He announced the City Council Regular meeting will begin at 6:40 p.m.

The PowerPoint presentation is on file and available for viewing in the Clerk of Council's office.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the Workshop at 6:16 p.m.

A 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=UD0g0lv3xkVK>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

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

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

