



**JANUARY 9, 2025 - 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 **11:05 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  
Deputy City Attorney Jen Herman  
Clerk of Council Representative Gwendolyn Jones  
Assistant to Clerk of Council Renee Osborne

**Workshop Agenda Items**

[1. Tourism Compliance Update \(Short-Term Vacation Rentals, Walking Tours, and Tourism Service Vehicles\)](#)

[Exhibit 1: STVR and Walking Tour Update.pdf](#)

**TOURISM COMPLIANCE UPDATE (Short-Term Vacation Rentals, Walking Tours, and Tourism Service Vehicles)**

City Manager Melder stated that the Council has taken meaningful action to acquire technology (new software approved in 2023) to help Team Savannah monitor short term vacation rentals and to help keep enforce and regulate compliance issues. He stated that we have one of the

most highly regarded short term vacation rental ordinances in the U.S. He discussed the changes and modifications to the way that we manage trolley tours, walking tours and STVRs. The Tourism Compliance Update was presented by Senior Director of Planning and Urban Design Bridget Lidy and Senior Director of Code Compliance Cynthia Knight, as well as Senior Director for Film and Special Events Susan Broker, and their respective teams.

Bridget Lidy stated that in 2015 and in 2017 Council adopted new revisions and ordinances to regulate STVRs and provide greater protections in neighborhoods. She defined the meaning of short-term vacation rentals including the timeframe for a STVR which must not exceed more than 30 consecutive days. Enhanced coordination amongst various departments including Revenue, IT, and GIS has supported the implementation process and ensured licensing regulations.

Cynthia Knight shared information about RentalScape which is the the new complaint portal for STVRs. In addition, she shared information about advertising, property information, complaints and enforcement. Officers are to respond within two hours after receiving the complaint. The most common types of violations are: unpermitted (illegal operations), safety code violations, sanitation and rental occupancy, parking, and noise. The violations have doubled in size during the past 2 years due to the RentalScape software that has helped to identify more violations. There were 544 complaints received and 140 of those were found to be valid.

Bridget Lidy also reviewed the remittance of hotel/motel tax which brings in approximately 25% of the hotel/motel tax collections.

Bridget Lidy introduced Susan Broker the Senior Director of Special Events and Tourism Department. Susan Broker spoke about the Tourism for Hire ordinance and a modernization of the tour service vehicles. She stated that the goal was to address the concerns of the downtown neighborhood residents especially with regards to the noise. The Walking Tour guides may have up to 100 people in one area at a time which contributes to the noise and crowding on/near entrances to properties (especially after 10:00 p.m.) She stated that ideally we would love to provide visitors with the best view of Savannah as possible. They are proposing a 90-day pilot program that will restrict the walks (South of Liberty Street) past ten o'clock p.m. and reduce the tour group size.

Susan Broker shared that there would be upcoming opportunities for public input at the Coastal Georgia Center on Monday, January 13th (11:00 a.m. & 6:00 p.m.) and Wednesday, January 15th (6:00 p.m.)

Mayor Johnson stated that there is a concern regarding STVRs. The state legislature may take action and we could lose control of addressing issues of home rule. Savannah should be a great place to live, first. Modifications to business practices should address that.

Ald. Leggett stated that past issues with STVRs include parking issues for the residents in the area/block due to a major increase in all of the guests, and due to an inability to reach the management regarding citations. Ald. Leggett asked how many illegal STVR violations there are and how can they be identified?

Cynthia Knight stated that prior to the RentalScape software they primarily relied on complaints coming into the department. There are currently 340 complaints and with the software they are tackled one at a time. There is a STVR Hotline/Portal for residents to use after hours. They can submit information via the Portal; or call the 24-hour Hotline: (912)226-0320.

Ald. Leggett asked the City Manager for increased advertising and communications on the City's website to inform the public. In addition, he suggested to advertise through the neighborhood association meetings and to discuss with the neighborhood association presidents so that they may pass on the information to their residents.

Ald. Leggett had a concern regarding the walking tours timetable. With many of the local parks closing at 9:00 p.m., how would the times be modified appropriately?

City Manager Melder stated that although walking paths and squares remain available to everyone, activities in the parks do cease overnight. The times can be discussed/modified as long as we continue to maintain the priority of the residents.

Ald. Palumbo thanked the teams for the presentation. He stated the importance of the provision for STVRs. They should not be deregulated. What we have in Savannah works. He likes the portal and the transparency for residents and visitors as well. He is encouraged that technology has caught up with the enforcement of the STVRs. He asked how can we minimize complaints and acquire data from the pilot program- is there a correlation to crime numbers? In addition, he would like other Council members to look at the issues surrounding horse-drawn carriages - he feels there is a moral imperative to lower the operational temperature for the horses. If it is too hot for humans then it is definitely too hot for the horses.

Ald. Bell asked about a report that the City Manager's Office had regarding the horse-drawn carriages. City Manager Melder stated he submitted options to Council and one of the options was the "wet bulb" scientific approach to weather conditions appropriate for horses to operate in. The other option is a temperature reading to gauge when it is too hot. Ald. Bell wants to see the preferred options and would like to discuss it as a Council rather than receiving individual reports.

Ald. Bell thanked the staff who worked on the portal - she heard from a resident that the technology is working.

City Manager Melder stated that the SPD Community Officer Resource Program budget was doubled and they have partnered with Code Compliance to help enforce these issues.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan thanked them for their presentation. She stated that of the 1700 certificates that were given for STVRs how many have insurance and by what methods will we enforce the ones that are not in compliance; why are they tier-based (financially) for public safety and for public works. She is interested in protecting neighborhoods and communities. With StreetScapes there is a map of where the STVRs are supposed to be. She asked how are they monitoring the walking tours. They collect fees for the STVRs; are they collecting fees for the walking tours? We must do a better job with policing and protecting communities. Ald. Wilder-Bryan also asked them to clarify what the current boundaries are and the opportunities for other districts. She foresees a negative impact in the other districts if people are not better informed.

City Manager Melder responded that all revenues related to walking tour providers must have a business license and a permit. Any fees/proceeds generated from tickets and taxes go to the City Revenue. STVRs are a zoning issue and he stated that they would make sure that maps and public information are updated to show places where STVRs are operating illegally (including hotspots for illegal activity). He also stated that we are always trying to improve public engagement and will communicate what is/is not an STVR. The public dashboards have greatly improved. He clarified the meaning of STVR and how it's defined in the ordinance specifically in the Downtown Historic District, the Victorian District and the Streetcar District. Potential expansion into other neighborhoods will have to be driven by neighborhoods and the Council with a zoning amendment.

Ald. Lanier asked what is the goal/ideal areas for STVRs to operate and what the saturation point is in relation to the number of homes in the area.

City Manager Melder stated that the ordinance caps the number of PINs in an area, so that no one neighborhood can have more than 40% of its PINs as STVRs, and issue permits based on the cap (leaving 60% as residential properties). It can be an investment opportunity and a wealth-building opportunity for the owners.

The Mayor stated that nationally there is a direct correlation between the number of STVRs and the lack of availability of affordable housing as well as housing prices.

Ald. Miller Blakely thanked everyone for their presentation and asked the City Manager when there will be a discussion regarding the expansion of STVRs. She is receiving phone calls from residents who feel it is unfair that only particular districts have STVRs. Those districts are able to make money when other areas would like the opportunities to have economic drivers for their community as well. She also asked Susan Broker how/when she reached out to the residents about the Community Input Opportunity Meetings. Some residents have not received the information regarding the meetings. Susan Broker stated that they collect all the emails from

the registered companies and send invites directly to them. There are currently three meeting opportunities for residents. She stated if there are people who have not received the information to forward them directly to her. Ald. Miller Blakely asked out of the 62 registered walking tour companies, how many are African American? Susan Broker replied that they do not collect that data. City Manager Melder stated that no racial or ethnic information on business licenses (or alcohol licenses) is collected. She asked for clarification for where the to-go cup zone starts and ends (for the public). It was confirmed that it ends at Jones Street.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that she had conversations with residents who would like to have STVRs in the 5th District and to be able to utilize their properties as an economic boost. She is looking forward to continuing the conversation as we develop and expand new zoning ordinances.

Ald. Wilder-Bryan acknowledged two individuals from the community that have been working with STVR and SDRA: Mary Sue McCarthy and David McDonald (both from the 3rd District) who have been helpful in allowing a balance between residential and commercial growth.

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

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz moved to end the Workshop Meeting and enter into Executive Session regarding Litigation, seconded by Ald. Wilder-Bryan and Ald. Miller Blakely. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

The Executive Session started at **12:50pm**. No action was taken and Mayor Johnson adjourned the Executive Session at **1:30pm**.

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

There was no action taken during the Workshop.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the workshop/executive session at **1:30 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>

