



JULY 27, 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 4:32 p.m. Mayor Johnson recognized Alderman Purtee to offer a prayer.

PRESENT:

Mayor Van R. Johnson, II, Presiding
Aldерwoman Kesha Gibson-Carter, At-Large, Post 1
Aldерwoman Alicia Miller Blakely, At-Large, Post 2
Aldерwoman Bernetta B. Lanier, District 1
Aldерman Detric Leggett, District 2
Aldерwoman Linda Wilder-Bryan, District 3
Aldерman Nick Palumbo, District 4, Vice-Chairman
Aldерwoman Dr. Estella Edwards Shabazz, District 5, Mayor Pro-Tem
Aldерman Kurtis Purtee, District 6

ALSO, PRESENT:

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

Workshop Agenda Items

[1. Financial & Compliance Audit](#)

[Exhibit 1: 2022 Financial and Compliance Audit 7-27-2023.pdf](#)

Mayor Johnson opened the workshop and introduced City Manager Melder to give an overview of the workshop information.

City Manager Melder introduced the City's auditor, Mauldin & Jenkins Partner Trey Scott; he also acknowledged Chief Financial Officer David Maxwell's twenty years working on the City's audit, and recognized Senior Budget Director Melissa Carter and thanked their teams for the diligent work on the audit and budget.

Following the presentation by Trey Scott, questions from Council were answered by Mr. Scott, David Maxwell, Melissa Carter, and City Manager Melder.

- Mayor Johnson thanked and congratulated the City Manager, David Maxwell and the City's Auditors on a successful audit.
- Since the chief recommendation from the audit report (Mr. Scott) was to decrease the funding gap in the general fund, Alderman Palumbo asked Mr. Scott for the chief strategies used by other municipalities to achieve the funding gap in the general fund balance. Mr. Scott suggested the City increase revenue or decrease expenses. Best practices by municipalities and the City's upcoming budget process were discussed by Mayor Johnson and City Manager Melder.
- Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked Mr. Scott for the audit report. She expressed her satisfaction with the pension and OPEB trust funds reports. Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz asked Mr. Scott to restate the property tax collection process.
- Alderwoman Miller Blakely thanked Mr. Scott and asked the number of years Mauldin & Jenkins did the audit for the City and if the audits were satisfactory. Mr. Scott answered, Mauldin & Jenkins has done the City audits for five years and the audits were satisfactory. She expressed concern for the retirees who are asking for an increase and asked City Manager Melder if the increase will be possible. City Manager Melder stated he/staff is looking into the possibility of an increase for retirees in the FY2024 budget; he plans on supplying Council with options.
- Alderwoman Lanier expressed an area that could be improved is increasing the City's bond rating to a triple A (AAA). This would allow the City to borrow money more cheaply. City Manager Melder discussed ways the City could improve its credit rating which included an increased fund balance. Alderwoman Lanier asked besides an increased fund balance what other factors would help to increase the City's credit rating. Mr. Maxwell answered, the credit rating agencies look at level of reserve balances, economic demographics, poverty rate, and median property values.
- Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan thanked Mr. Maxwell, Ms. Carter and Mr. Scott. She indicated after last year's audit report, Mauldin & Jenkins offered additional information to Council in the form of a monthly report. With the assistance of Mr. Maxwell, Alderwoman Wilder-Bryan has received the monthly report and she recommended reading the informational report to other Council Members for better understanding and clarity.
- Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked why the Enmarket Arena was not mentioned in the audit report. Mr. Maxwell indicated the arena was included with the Civic Center fund in the Proprietary Fund Activity-2022 Report. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter requested the amount received only from the arena. Mr. Maxwell indicated the upfront amount in the contract was \$5 million paid over the course of construction, and Alderwoman Gibson-Carter requested a breakdown of how and when the City received the \$5 million. Mr. Maxwell stated the information is in the contract, he will send Alderwoman Gibson-Carter a copy of the contract.
- Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked City Manager Melder for a hard number of the amount received from operations of the arena. After completion of the OVG audit, City Manager Melder indicated a report was sent to Council Members on the arena profits. Another report will be sent to Alderwoman Gibson-Carter. City Manager Melder indicated the total number of revenue share to the City from OVG was \$583,914.00. Mr. Maxwell indicated the Enmarket Arena has a separate audit for that building. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter suggested the arena should be a separate fund in the audit, not included in the Civic Center fund. City Manager Melder indicated a separate arena fund could be established.
- Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked the contract period for Mauldin & Jenkins and the end date of the contract. Five year contract ending this year. Mr. Maxwell indicated staff is working on an city audit service RFP to be sent out within the next couple of weeks. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked for the amount of the Mauldin & Jenkins contract; Mr. Maxwell answered, approximately \$135,000.00 for the financial statement audit and the single audit.
- Mayor Johnson thanked everyone for their participation.

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

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

[Exhibit 1: 072723 City Manager's Update.pdf](#)

City Manager Melder's update presentation included a review of five agenda purchasing items. For the police department, two for technology, one for equipment, one for police strategy and management, and one for a weapons system. For short-term vacation rentals, management software, Rentalscape, that will allow residents to call a hotline for any issues, twenty-four hours, seven days a week. The program will assist code compliance in identifying properties out of compliance.

Following the presentation comments and questions from members of the City Council were answered by City Manager Melder, Mayor Johnson, and Assistant Police Chief Gavin:

- Mayor Johnson thanked City Manager Melder, Police Chief Gunther, Assistant Police Chief Gavin, and the police department for the outstanding services rendered to the citizens of

Savannah.

- Alderman Purtee stated that he teaches firearms use and safety to police officers and new recruits. He stated the new system improves all around skills with weapons, with safety, and shooting proficiency. The system is truly beneficial.
- Alderman Palumbo thanked City Manager Melder for the new weapons safety system and asked Assistant Police Chief Gavin to explain the old system. Assistant Chief Gavin stated the current weapons system is twenty-seven years old. The new weapons system will assist officers to be more accurate, field of vision will improve, bystanders will be safer, and the holsters and body equipment will be improved. Alderman Palumbo asked City Manager Melder to explain the FUSUS system. City Manager Melder indicated the FUSUS system is being used by other communities and the City of Atlanta. The police department can integrate the system into shotspotter, license plate readers, body worn cameras, and a citizen's ring camera. It will give police officers an effective tool in solving crime.
- Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked Assistant Chief Gavin what will happen to the old weapons and how many will be replaced. Assistant Chief Gavin indicated there are five hundred weapons that will be a one-for-one swap. The old weapons will go back to the company.
- Mayor Pro-Tem Dr. Shabazz discussed the FUSUS technology and how it will enhance the current systems used by the police department and engaging the citizens. She asked how the citizens can register. City Manager Melder used the City of Atlanta as an example. Atlanta established a website, Connect Atlanta, where citizens can go to the website and receive the necessary information. Savannah would use the same platform for citizens to register. The City will provide a roll-out program and there will also be community meetings explaining the program. Alderwoman Miller Blakely expressed concern as it relates to the identity of the registered homeowner's camera. Who will be able to access the information. City Manager Melder indicated the information will only be available to certain law enforcement officials. Assistant Chief Gavin stated the information is protected from open records similar to shotspotter. All information is relayed inside the police department and no information is shared in the City's system and no physical visits to the homes are required.
- Alderwoman Gibson-Carter recommended posting signs on businesses using the system to deter crime. She expressed concern for individual's rights being violated and asked City Manager Melder if there are any protections for citizens who participate. City Manager Melder indicated citizen participation is completely voluntary. Citizens would complete a form with their address, if an incident happened in their neighborhood the police would contact them to see if their camera captured anything suspicious during the timeframe. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter recommended a complete explanation of how the system works and the residents responsibility during the educational roll-out phase. As it relates to the new weapons, Alderwoman Gibson-Carter recommended revisiting firearms training as to when and how officers use guns. City Manager Melder discussed police officers and training techniques for difficult/sensitive encounters during a criminal situation. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked how the FUSUS system was selected (RFP process?) and the cost. Assistant Chief Gavin and City Manager Melder explained the system was discussed at length over time and several systems were reviewed. The FUSUS system was selected/determined to be the best for the City. The purchase amount was \$150,000.00

Mayor Johnson stated State law requires the officers are trained in firearms. High caliber candidates are selected for the Savannah Police Department training program. It should be noted, over the past two years, four of the five officers involved in shootings have been cleared of any suspicious behavior (wrong-doing). Alderman Purtee indicated the Savannah officers are trained to deescalate situations, and the Behavioral Health Unit has referred offenders to programs rather than arrest.

Mayor Johnson thanked everyone for participating in the presentation.

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

Mayor Johnson adjourned the Workshop at 5:59 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=1hSZwL9uYsgO7NQt>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

Date Minutes Approved: _____

Signature: _____

