



JUNE 22, 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 4:31 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. Board Appointments](#)

[Exhibit 1: Available Appointments to Boards.pdf](#)

Facilitated by Mayor Johnson. The following nominations were submitted:

- **Coastal Region MPO Citizens Advisory Council** – Robert R. Pirie (two-year term) - nominated by Alderman Leggett.
- **Downtown Savannah Authority** - (One Vacancy & Two Expired Terms) - POSTPONED at the request of Mayor Johnson.
- **Historic District Board of Review** – Robert G. Becker (three-year term) - nominated by Alderman Leggett.
- **Hospital Authority of Savannah**

- Taqwaa Saleem (four-year term) - recommended for reappointment by Mayor Johnson
- Grace H. Taylor (four-year term) - recommended for reappointment by Mayor Johnson
- Dr. Jose de Arimateia da Cruz (four-year term) - nominated by Alderman Purtee
- **Savannah-Chatham Historic Sites and Monuments Commission** – Dr. Nicholas Henry (five-year term) - nominated by Alderman Palumbo.

[2. Pension Update II](#)

City Manager Melder acknowledged a Pension Update was presented at the June 8, 2023, workshop, but comments and questions were continued for today's workshop.

Mayor Johnson indicated any questions from Council Member could be sent in writing to his office and they would be addressed. Retirees can submit written questions to the Mayor's office for a response.

Pension Board Member Alderman Palumbo provided an overview of the pension board membership and an explanation of the Board's duties and responsibilities. Alderman Palumbo responded following Mr. Eason's comments with regard to the investment responsibilities and fund performance. He invited everyone to a pension board meeting to view how the employees manage the fund.

Vice President and Treasurer of the Eternal Order of Police in Savannah Bob Eason gave a brief synopsis of his background and experience with pension plans. He is advocating for those who have elected him in Savannah (Firefighters and police officers). Mr. Eason responded to the Pension Update presentation of June 8, 2023. The concerns/highlights of his discussion included the following:

- Firefighters raise.
- Pension fund performance is low.
- Money Managers' investment selections are questionable.
- Pension plan needs to be update/adjusted.
- Cost of living adjustment is needed for retirees.

City Manager Melder indicated City Council Members have no authority over the investments or selection strategies involved in the pension fund, the process is managed by the pension fund board.

Alderwoman Gibson-Carter asked City Manager Melder if any of the requests received by retirees will be honored. City Manager Melder indicated the June 8, 2023 presentation identified two options for Council consideration, and the option for the retirees to receive a 13th check annually. Alderwoman Gibson-Carter recommended the City reevaluate staffing and spending practices, rather than increase the employees donation into the pension fund. She also discussed the millage rate and how it effects the retirees if not rolled back.

Alderwoman Miller Blakely asked the City Manager if the meeting held with retirees produced a consensus for all parties involved. City Manager Melder indicated the meeting took place last year and no consensus was met. Alderwoman Miller Blakely and City Manager Melder discussed the pension funds decrease in value due to the volatility of the markets.

Alderwoman Lanier asked City Manager Melder if the pension board was under advisement of a professional investment advisor/manager (yes).

[3. Mid-year Financial Update](#)

[Exhibit 1: FY23 Midyear Financial Update Presentation.pptx](#)

Senior Budget Director Melissa Carter, Assistant City Manager Lloyd, and City Manager Melder presented the FY2023 mid-year financial update. Following the presentation, comments and questions were offered by City Council Members:

- City Manager Melder indicated he is recommending the city maintain the 12.20 millage rate so the city can continue to capture growth in the digest and pay for unfunded stormwater capital improvement needs for now and in the future.
- Mayor Johnson stated maintaining the 12.20 millage rate will allow the city to capture money needed for stormwater improvements. It will not pay for the total cost, but it's a way to start a fund for stormwater.
- Alderwoman Lanier expressed her concerns:
 - City operating on a zero based budgeting process.
 - Current millage rate versus the rollback rate.
 - City's bond rating - AA1 versus AAA, the city is at AA1 due to it's poverty rate.
 - The city may be contributing to displacement of residents by increasing property taxes, residents will move out of the city.

- Policy initiatives recommended; gentrification exemption, capture grant opportunities, and rent management.
- The city should look to alleviate the burden of taxes for residents.
- Springfield Canal, spent \$45 million in one particular area, yet there still remains drainage issues.
- Alderman Palumbo asked City Manager Melder:
 - Does the city have an impact on the valuation of property/taxes (no).
 - Does the city currently have a dedicated stormwater fund (no).
 - What will happen to homes in the area if a hurricane hits the concerned/targeted areas, Victory Drive, Liberty City, or Hayner's Creek (it will flood into the low lying areas, water cannot flow and homes will be impacted with the water).
 - With the city's current infrastructure, can the city withstand a major tropical storm (there will be areas of the city that will flood).
- Alderwoman Gibson-Carter addressed the following.
 - City staff listen to residents as it relates to the millage rate, before and during public hearings.
 - Concerns with AECOM Hunt cost overruns of \$4.5 million.
 - Recommended the city consider other sources of revenue besides tax increases.
 - The budget is based on historical figures, recommend budget staff interact with the public for their feedback.
 - Expressed concern for policemen receiving raises under the prior millage rate, some did not realize an increase. Funds for salary increases should not come from increased taxes, but use city slush funds or pockets of money not allocated.
 - City received ARPA funds of approximately \$57 million. City Manager Melder indicated the funds were used for citizen's services in the FY2022 Budget, i.e. City Council approved projects: recreation, meter readers, sidewalks & infrastructure, community centers, etc.
- Alderwoman Miller Blakely addressed the following.
 - Asked City Manager Melder about the 2021-2022 Federal Bi-partisan funds from the infrastructure bill (the city received funds for studies & infrastructure planning and funds for the flyover removal study, but no capital funds).
 - Requested more information regarding the Hayner's Creek flooding. Assistant City Manager Lloyd explained the flooding in that area.
 - Will the city's budgeted funds help with the Augusta Avenue & Lathrop flooding areas. Assistant City Manager Lloyd explained any improvements of the Springfield Canal will help alleviate the various bottleneck areas of flooding in the city.
 - A chart for a rollback for city commercial property was displayed, why not a rollback for city resident property. City Manager Melder indicated a rollback for city resident property will be discussed in the two upcoming millage rate public hearings. The rollback rate would be 11.119 mills.
 - Expressed concern that the City of Savannah will become like Charleston, SC where the African American citizens were forced out of the city. The property taxes continued to increase, forcing those unable to pay to vacate or sell their homes. The value of the homes in Savannah have increased causing property taxes to increase. This could cause a burden on some residents.

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

[4. Added Item: City Manager's Update](#)

[Exhibit 1: Community Improvement Districts.pdf](#)

NOT PRESENTED.

Mayor Johnson adjourned the Workshop at 6:20 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=bOIIATUGxgAT7Nma>

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

Date Minutes Approved: _____

Signature: _____

