SAVANNAH
savannahga.gov

OCTOBER 22, 2026 - 11:00 a.m. - WORKSHOP and CITY MANAGER'S BRIEFING

CITY GOVERNMENT

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

The work session was held at **11:04 a.m.**, in the 2nd Floor Media Room. Mayor Johnson, called the meeting to order, then recognized Alderman Kurtis Purtee to offer a prayer.

PRESENT:

Mayor Van R. Johnson, II

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, 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

Assistant City Manager Taffanye Young

City Attorney Bates Lovett

Clerk of Council Mark Massey

Workshop Agenda Items

1. Presentation from MPC on 2040 Comprehensive Plan Update

1. Five-Year Comprehensive Plan Update Presentation.pdf

Mayor Johnson provided an overview of the workshop agenda. He explained how the comprehensive plan update was placed on the workshop and regular meeting agendas. Mayor Johnson assured the Council that neither the City Manager nor he ignored the will of the Council as it relates to making sure that we space out the information we get and then the information that we are asking the Council to make a decision on.

City Manager Melder mentioned the state's deadline of October 31st for the comprehensive plan update. He stated the comprehensive plan update is a requirement for every municipality, and so, we need to meet that requirement. City Manager Melder stated he would make a call to

DRAFT

the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to understand exactly what the possibilities are for a later adoption by the City Council of the plan update. He then turned it over to Ms. Melanie Wilson, Executive Director and CEO of the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), to give an update on the proposed comprehensive plan update titled 2040-2045.

Prior to the presentation, Ald. Miller Blakely and Ald. Lanier both had questions. Ald. Miller Blakley asked about the October 31st deadline. Ald. Lanier mentioned when SEDA, the county, and some other agencies put millions of dollars together, and they wanted the City Council to bring a couple of members from the city to a meeting to discuss a plan. She asked whether this comprehensive plan was the same plan (previously mentioned). City Manager Melder responded.

Following the presentation, City Council members discussed and asked questions.

Mayor Johnson stated that the Council has made it clear that we just do not want to have to consider something and vote on it at the same time because understandably we want the time to digest it and then have the opportunity to vote on it. He further stated that the work that the MPC does and continues to do, on our behalf, has been methodologically sound, and he would characterize this as being one of those emergent circumstances where we can make an exception. Mayor Johnson stated he was fine with voting on this today.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz thanked Ms. Wilson for the presentation, the continuous presentation, on the initial plan, 2040, and now with the change of 2045. She stated that because of the work that she does outside of the workshop or City Council's regular meetings, specifically with the CORE MPO, she knows the importance of having this plan approved and moving forward. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz mentioned that there were some fantastic items on the City Council's regular meeting agenda today that would hopefully get passed: the legacy project and the fairgrounds. She stated those dollars have come from the state in reference to the awesome work that MPC continues to do for us. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated that this was one of those necessary things that has to be done due to the fact of how we get funding and how the funding is laid out. She also explained that amendments or addendums that need to be done can happen with this.

Ald. Wilder stated the bottom line for her was that we should not risk important funding unnecessarily, but neither should we rush into a long-term plan without answers. She stated we have this vision in this plan, but the accountability is not stretching to where it needs to be, and it is not for the people who live here. Ald. Wilder asked the following:

- What protections are in place for neighborhoods, affordable housing, drainage, and natural resources?
- If we are going to do this, could we change it?
- Could we clarify whether any remaining deadlines or funding risk requires immediate adoption?

Ald. Wilder expressed that the plan is supposed to be intended to guide growth over the years, but there is nothing specific for the growth in communities where people live. She stated she was not saying that the Council should not vote for it, but she believes that there is some concern about the year 2040, what the expectation was, and how it is going to affect the black historic neighborhoods. City Manager Melder and Executive Director Ms. Wilson responded.

City Manager Melder confirmed with DCA that we do have a firm deadline of October 31st. If we do not have proof of approval of the updated comprehensive plan, the consequences are that we lose the qualified local government status in the state and risk not being eligible at the time for grants that require qualified local government status, of which there are several.

Ald. Wilder asked if this could have been adopted earlier than October? Why did we wait until a couple of days before the deadline and present this? Why are we now saying that we have to rush for things that are not going to have any protection? City Manager Melder and Executive Director Ms. Wilson responded.

Ald. Lanier stated we do want to make the deadline; that is important, but we can't just send something that we are not comfortable with. What is happening here, if we pass this, is business as usual, and that is the problem. Ald. Lanier stated that when she was a young public

DRAFT

administrator and community leader, she saw a future land use map. She forgot what year it depicted, but it was not keeping up with what the community wanted. Ald. Lanier stated that since that time, she was determined to get involved to the extent of changing that. She shared how she was involved throughout the years. Ald. Lanier stated we now need to do two things. We need to create some area plans of the areas that never got planned, and then we need to go back and revisit all of the ones that exist from 2006-2010 and some older ones of the historic districts. Ald. Lanier stated we have all of these outdated plans out here, and we haven't implemented anything to talk about. Then, we got this comprehensive plan that sort of combines all of those plans that does not represent what the people want. Ald. Lanier stated she was not comfortable right now because she needs to look at the FLUM. She further stated that it is a lot of verbiage in that plan that talks about the desire and the direction that we are going in as a City, and it really doesn't match up with our current growth and development. Looking at the map that was before the Council, Ald. Lanier expressed that the map represents industrial properties in the City of Savannah; however, we need to go back and add the unincorporated county because some of these abut city neighborhoods. You are not getting a good depiction of where the industry is abutting the people because you are leaving out the unincorporated part. Ald. Lanier asked about the FLUM as it relates to 2045. She also asked whether we submitted the area plans or whatever MPC needed to change the document. Executive Director Ms. Wilson and City Manager Melder responded.

Mayor Johnson stated that when he was in the 1st District, he made sure every one of the neighborhoods, at the time, had a neighborhood plan. He stated we had a team of planners whose job was to do the micro work of working with the neighborhoods to create the plans and then to update the plans.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked the following questions:

- What happened to the area plans that were already in existence? (The plans are still there.)
- Why have we not done anything with those plans?
- Why are we so focused on the canal district and other new things, when we have not done anything with the old stuff we have? Executive Director Ms. Wilson responded.
- When we speak of FLUM, for our general public to know, what is the FLUM? (The Future Land Use Map.)

Ald. Miller Blakely expressed her thoughts about how the planning department would connect with MPC to have the area maps/plans implemented inside of our comprehensive plan. Ald. Miller Blakely asked why the plans that were already in place weren't given to Ms. Wilson and her department so that they could have been done, as opposed to them sitting on the shelf.

Mayor Johnson stated the reason why we did the neighborhood plans, particularly with such urgency, was to protect zoning--to make sure those neighborhoods, residential in nature and abutted by industrial uses, would remain residential. The plans did what they were supposed to do; we have not had the industrial intrusion. Mayor Johnson stated we need to update those plans to reflect the work that is being done, but this is not necessarily this conversation.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated Ms. Wilson talked about the people she reached out to, and she knows that a lot of people, specifically African-American people, did not participate. She then asked Ms. Wilson how she reached out to those people to get their feedback or input outside of what she normally does? Executive Director Ms. Wilson responded.

Ald. Leggett asked whether we would call the comprehensive plan a living document. (Yes, the City Council has the ability to approve and/or amend it.) Ald. Leggett stated this was a quality of life issue. He mentioned what he heard from the community regarding the Vision 2033 and 2045 Plan as it relates to African American people.

Ald. Wilder stated we have these plans, but they never reach the people, whether they are white, black, indian, gay, or straight. We have to fix this. Ald. Wilder stated she has talked to the community, and they are afraid. She expounded upon Ald. Leggett's previous statement by stating you can't move a race out, but you can move them out from where they live. That's what they are concerned about. Ald. Wilder asked which neighborhood or corridors they believe are designated for more intense development--who is at risk for development? City Manager Melder and Executive Director Ms. Wilson responded.

DRAFT

Mayor Johnson stated we have a GPS plan that talks about equity and engagement. This does not prevent us from charging the City Manager to continue to engage and improve. City Manager Melder responded. In reference to the City Manager's response, Mayor Johnson asked how much time he would need to be able to get back with the Council. Mayor Johnson stated the consternation was that we have a lot of plans; hundreds of plans for hundreds of reasons that often overlap. He further stated that at some point, he would like to be able to thread, as much as we can, them together so we could see the interlap and an overlay of all of the different plans that we have because they are all necessary. Mayor Johnson stated he does not think it is anything nefarious going on; it's just depending on who's the funding agency and what their requirements are. Obviously, as a municipal government, we are required to do all of them and be engaged in all of them, and so, it gets confusing to the public.

Ald. Wilder asked for an itemized list, date by date, to say what we are doing, as far as planning, with these communities and how they are actually going to be incorporated into protecting them, because the bottom line is accountability and protecting them. There are people who are afraid of how it (the comprehensive plan) is going to affect them and their neighborhoods, and what she was hearing Ms. Wilson say was that she is not responsible for that. We are responsible for making this happen. Ald. Wilder expressed that, in this comprehensive plan, it should describe some goals of how the people are going to be protected. City Manager Melder responded.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated she was very clear, especially with her constituents, on what we must do today, and we are ready to move forward with all the conversation that has taken place at the table. She stated she did a deep dive and located some neighborhood planning documents that she was working on before 2020. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz stated we were doing that type of work in the neighborhoods, and what she has heard from around the table today was that our council members, along with herself, have to protect our people. So going back to doing neighborhood planning and touching the people is how we touch each person door by door, person by person, to understand what their needs and wants are. Then we come to this overarching comprehensive plan. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz further stated we still have our Assistant City Manager (Taffanye Young), who is extremely brilliant when it comes to this work, and she has been there from the ground up making sure that the work was done.

Ald. Bell asked the City Manager to identify the goal and purpose of each of those plans because she was not sure that was clear. She stated there seemed to have been so many different plans, a compilation of so many of them, and it is confusing. Ald. Bell stated if we clearly state the purpose of each of those plans, it would be helpful for this body as well as the citizens. City Manager Melder responded.

Mayor Johnson stated we have to do a better job of documenting the work. He mentioned how the work was done in West Savannah (the improvements to the Moses Jackson Resource Center), Woodville (renovated community center, issues with the train tracks, and the water improvements), and Hudson Hill (brand new community center), but plans were not updated. Mayor Johnson stated once we create these plans and the work is done, we need to go back and check that off. He stated that, as opposed to thinking nothing has been done, we have done the work.

Ald. Lanier stated we have a FLUM that has so much in it, but it is not the current desire of the community. She explained her viewpoint on how we got in this situation. Ald. Lanier asked to see the character areas. She stated we have been talking a lot about policies that lend themselves to affordable housing, but we need to make the industrial overlay a critical part of this conversation and proceedings if we are trying to identify how we need to change the future land use map (FLUM). Ald. Lanier stated we can't separate those two because that would help us make decisions about where we need to alter these industrial zones. The inclusionary zoning should have been something we embraced back when she asked for it in 2020. She stated we would've had more affordable units at this point. However, back to this plan, Ald. Lanier thinks about the industrial overlay and how it plays a part in us making decisions about the future land use map. City Manager Melder responded. Ald. Lanier mentioned Ald. Leggett's concern about the people being displaced. She stated we need to be concerned about that because this is not just an arbitrary thing that people are feeling--we have the numbers. Ald. Lanier mentioned the

DRAFT

results of the last census and expressed the need for putting a lot of energy behind the 2029 census.

Ald. Miller Blakely stated that we are talking about our city and its growth and development. She further expressed how City Council should take a tour, similar to the one city staff went on the day before, of SCAD properties and how they are moving into the city in certain areas. City Manager Melder responded.

2. Data Center Ordinance Development Discussion

2. Data Center Ordinance Development Presentation.pdf

City Manager Melder provided a brief overview regarding the adopted moratorium on large-scale data center development and the development of a draft ordinance. He mentioned that as part of the Chatham Municipal Association, the City of Savannah, along with Chatham County, would host a workshop with Georgia Tech, which is leading a lot of this work in Georgia and helping communities think through data center growth and development, whether it's right for one community or another. City Manager Melder then turned the presentation over to Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs Officer Megan Sebold, MPC Executive Director & CEO Melanie Wilson, Planning & Economic Development Chief Faye DiMassimo, and Water Resources Chief Ron Feldner.

Mayor Johnson stated he and Ald. Purtee attended the GMA board meeting, and this is a hot issue around the world. He stated we are in a good space because everybody's trying to figure it out. There is a lot of data being gathered, but also a lot of talk. It also might be hot on the legislative agenda this year.

Ald. Purtee stated GMA is bringing in a group of individuals on December 12th at GMA's headquarters to discuss what data centers look like in other communities and how it is going to impact some concerns that we have specific to Georgia.

Ald. Leggett asked whether we were looking at any type of litigation after this. City Attorney Lovett responded.

Ald. Lanier stated she was glad staff looked at the community benefit piece, but it concerns her because community benefit agreements are for residents where they have an opportunity to negotiate for benefits based on negative impacts of development. She stated she was glad that we have the special use permit because we could have that discussion, and it couldn't be done by right. Ald. Lanier said she guesses that having it (the community benefit agreement) in there is to give a peace of mind to residents, but she hopes we would not be in a situation where we have to have that. City Manager Melder responded.

Ald. Bell asked how we are informing the public of the stakeholder engagement, the web page, and making sure that they know they can speak out and they have a voice. City Manager Melder and Chief DiMassimo responded.

Ald. Miller Blakely asked whether someone has approached the city saying they want to put data centers in the area where there are warehouses. Ald. Miller Blakely also asked whether we could do a policy where we just do not have data centers in the City of Savannah. City Manager Melder responded.

Mayor Johnson responded to Ald. Miller Blakely's question about being approached stating for him the answer was three times. He stated he was unsure if they overlap, on at least on two of them. This precipitated the discussion between himself, the attorney, and the manager about how we approach this, which is why we came to the Council about a change in policy that would allow us to be able to determine what this is. Mayor Johnson stated we have to become educated about data centers. We did not want to unilaterally do something that would ultimately hurt/affect our community and our city's ability to provide services. Mayor Johnson recognized that now across the state, cities have done it and wished they had not. He stated he appreciates the Council because this is the more thoughtful approach--we have to have everybody at the table.

Ald. Palumbo thanked the government affairs team and our City Attorney's office for staying on top of this ordinance change that gives the Council the breathing room to have this discussion

DRAFT

where it is not in a panic, and it is not in a vacuum. He further stated that we have to understand the macro level of why this is happening because Georgia does not exist at the eye of the perfect storm when it comes to this issue. Ald. Palumbo stated that Georgia has space, water, the newest nuclear power plant, and has power too, and that is why they are here. He encouraged the Council to please be as deliberative as possible, be as selective as possible, and work to decommission them as diligently as possible. Ald. Palumbo stated he wanted the Council, the community, and the public to know that we invested in these utilities--ultimately, it is up to you how we choose to determine their future and how they are built.

Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz expressed that what she has heard thus far was that people do not want data centers in the city limits of the City of Savannah. She applauded the Mayor, City Manager, and City Attorney for having the Council on the ground and making sure that we are safe in our city. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz recommended a citywide meeting/a listening session at the Enmarket Arena in reference to this subject matter--calling the city to one place and having them listen to what we are talking about because everybody does not listen to our city council meetings.

Ald. Lanier stated it is not a new industry, but the way it is growing, it is new to a lot of people. She further stated understanding the negative and positive aspects of these data centers and having this discussion was good. Ald. Lanier expressed that this work we are doing is good because we should not have a blanket policy that says no data centers. Of course, we would not want anything in neighborhoods that was going to negatively impact the residents. Ald. Lanier stated she was not here to say we should not have data centers in the City of Savannah; she was saying that we should have some regulations in place to protect the people. She stated she was not going to support any data center if it comes before the Council for a special use permit when we have people in the room saying that particular type would bring noise, lights, or any kind of negative impact. Ald. Lanier stated that after all of the decades of suffering from environmental injustice, we would not want to welcome a whole new negative impact in the area, but there are so many different sizes and kinds of data centers. You just could not make a one-size-fits-all policy. She stated we would really have to look at all of them individually on how they would fit in a particular area. Ald. Lanier also mentioned the map that was presented was not a true depiction of the impact of industrial properties because some of that property was in unincorporated Chatham. She stated we need to include those also, and most people think that the IP property is City of Savannah because it sits right there in the midst of all those neighborhoods, but it is actually in the county.

Mayor Johnson stated what they saw was a very measured, thoughtful, comprehensive whole-of-government approach involving equity and community engagement. He further stated that this was just an update, and we are still on a clock as it relates to the second meeting in January 2027, in which staff will let us know where we are and what we need to do.

DRAFT

3. Closed Executive Session: Personnel, Litigation and Real Estate; As Needed

HELD. Mayor Pro Tem Dr. Shabazz moved to hold an executive session regarding real estate and litigation, seconded by Ald. Palumbo. The motion passed unanimously, 9-0-0.

Executive session started at 1:48 p.m. All City Council members were present, including City Manager Melder, City Attorney Lovett, and Clerk Massey.

No action was taken during executive session. The executive session concluded at 2:03 p.m.

4. City Manager's Update; As Needed

Exhibit 1: Tuesday Night Memo_Final_10202026.pdf

No City Manager Update was held.

The workshop and executive session were adjourned at 2:03 p.m. No action was taken.

Mark Massey, Clerk of Council

Date Minutes Approved: _____

Signature: _____

The video recording of the Workshop can be found by copying and pasting the link below into your url:

https://www.youtube.com/@cityofsavannah/videos

AgendaPlus®

DRAFT