



Office of the
City Manager

MEMORANDUM

TO: City Council

FROM: Joseph A. Melder, City Manager 

DATE: July 7, 2025

RE: Civic Legacy – Savannah Civic Center Project Update

On June 27, 2024, Mayor and Council approved a resolution to remove the arena and renovate the theater, ballroom, and community meeting rooms at the Savannah Civic Center. This decision and its associated funding allocations represent a major step toward revitalizing the site and advancing a project that aligns with Council's vision and supports the needs of the Savannah community.

The following key points of the resolution remain paramount as we move forward with work on this site:

- Revitalize the Savannah Civic Center area through an equitable approach to redevelopment.
- Retain the name and legacy of Dr. Martin. Luther King, Jr.
- Restore as much of the Oglethorpe Plan as feasible to honor Savannah's historic urban layout.
- Provide a vision for the future that prioritizes housing, including affordable and workforce housing.
- Prohibit the development of new hotels and restrict the use of short-term vacation rentals.
- Optimize the space for public and municipal use while allowing for appropriate retail and commercial spaces.
- Achieve future parking needs with planning for an underground parking deck.

As this project begins to take shape, I wanted to share an update on our progress as we move forward with the process.

Equity-Driven Public Engagement

The agenda includes the procurement of equity-driven public engagement services with Bluknowledge, LLC not to exceed \$70,000.00. The consultant will develop and implement a comprehensive, equity-driven public engagement initiative in support of the site's redevelopment. They will also play a critical role in ensuring that equity is at the core of the project by fostering inclusive public participation throughout the process and supporting other key aspects of the redevelopment effort with City staff and the associated

consultant team. This work will ensure that the principles of equity and community engagement are embedded in every phase of the project in a manner consistent with GPS and the Resolution.

Economic and Land Use Study

On June 12, 2025, City Council approved a contract for an Economic and Land Use Study for the site. The consultant will focus on the Civic Center site's redevelopment, including market and financial feasibility analyses, development strategies, cost-benefit modeling, parking needs, and strategic planning, all in alignment with the Savannah GPS Strategic Plan and priorities identified in the Resolution. The scope also includes phased implementation planning, public engagement, and compliance with zoning regulations to ensure sustainable, inclusive, and economically viable redevelopment.

Market Demand, Programming Analysis and Operations Study

An in-depth Market Demand, Programming Analysis, and Operations Study for the Civic Center is currently underway in partnership with AMS Planning & Research. As part of this effort, a survey is being conducted to gather additional input from Civic Center users. This process will help to inform the future design and renovation of the theater, meeting rooms, ballroom, lobby and other amenities associated with the space.

Arena Demolition

The City has received a cost estimate of approximately \$10 million for the arena demolition, which includes the demolition of the arena, construction of a new façade wall, relocation of the kitchen, and necessary mechanical, electrical, and plumbing modifications.

Design is on track to be complete by the fall of 2025. The Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR) for the arena demolition has been prepared and is expected to be posted this month. It is anticipated that the CMAR will submit a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) for council approval in the fourth quarter of 2025 so construction can begin in January 2026.

If you have any questions about these items, please let me know.

Thank you.