



## **State of the City – Nov. 5, 2025**

*Mayor Van R. Johnson II*

*Savannah is Winning*

**—Welcome Video—**

***Opening Ceremony***

***Invocation***

***Star Spangled Banner***

***Band***

***Mayor's Entrance***

**—Welcome Address—**

Savannah will be safe.

Savannah will be environmentally healthy.

Savannah will thrive economically.

Savannah will be safe, healthy and thriving for all of its citizens.

And all means all.

To the honorable members of the 140th Savannah City Council:

Mayor Pro Tem Estella Edwards Shabazz, District 5  
Council Vice Chair Nick Palumbo, District 4  
Aldерwoman Carol Bell, Post 1 At-Large  
Aldерwoman Alicia Miller Blakely, Post 2 At-Large  
Aldерwoman Bernetta Bryant Lanier, District 1  
Alderman Detric Leggett, District 2  
Aldерwoman Linda Wilder Bryan, District 3  
Alderman Kurtis Purtee, District 6.

City Manager Jay Melder, Assistant City Manager Taffanye Young, City Attorney Bates Lovett, City Clerk Mark Massey, members of Team Savannah, neighborhood, community, business, religious and youth leaders of our Youth Ambassador, and, most importantly, the residents of the City of Savannah:

Good evening.

Thank you for joining me tonight for the 2025 State of the City of Savannah.

If we stick with our football analogy and my numerous references to football tonight, Savannah is a championship program.

During the first half of this Council Term, your elected officials in the front office have issued a legislative game plan and our coaches—our City Manager and Chiefs— have ran practice, drawn up the X's and O's, and on game-day called winning plays on the field.

Everyday our Pro-Bowlers on Team Savannah execute those plays. We have a team of fierce public servants, dedicated to winning in all phases of the game.

I am going to brag a little bit about our team.

**Tonight, without pretense, I am proud to proclaim that Savannah is winning. The state of our city is financially strong, foundationally deep, and forward thinking.**

But you cannot appreciate the sweetness of winning unless you have tasted defeat. What defines a first-place champion is how you handle a loss.

We have responded to our defeats by strengthening our game plan. Time and again, we have put up the numbers, beat the odds, and topped the polls.

At each hashmark, as we meet benchmark goals and create new ones, we win the day. And when we win, all of Savannah wins.

To our residents, whether your Savannah legacy is six-generations deep or just beginning, you are part of a championship city.

And I welcome you to halftime of this City Council's term.

Tonight is for you, the residents of the greatest city on earth.

This is our annual report to you. You have entrusted us to lead your city. We do not take that mandate lightly. We advocate for you. We make the tackles and secure the coverage so you can hoist the trophy.

During this first half, we have experienced unprecedented growth in the region. In response, we have set in motion a game plan that secures an equitable and economically balanced future, a proverbial championship ring for all.

I want to break down some stats for you.

### **—Halftime Stats—**

Over the last five years, Savannah's economy has seen record growth.

According to the local Economic Monitor, second quarter numbers this year indicate a cooling of the upward trend. But we are still experiencing growth in manufacturing like we've not seen in a very long time.

The addition of the Hyundai Metaplant site and the industry around it, as well as growth in our legacy industries like Gulfstream, have had an enormous impact on our region.

The recent closure of International Paper was a shock to all. But with every setback comes an opportunity. We look forward to the new opportunities coming to our neighbors and friends and family impacted by the plant's closure.

This economic growth has bolstered our City.

In 2024, the City issued a record number of building construction permits valued at \$930 million dollars. Over 1,000 new permits for residential construction were issued for a total valuation of \$250 million.

Through the third quarter of this year, the City has issued 510 commercial permits and over 1,000 residential permits with a total valuation of \$618 million dollars.

We saw that economic growth echoed in our FY2025 Budget which featured nearly \$41 million dollars in added revenue. Our mid-year financial update indicated a positive variance in revenue as well, up by over \$3.3 million dollars. We also saw positive growth at the mid-year point in our water and sewer enterprise funds.

The 2025 tax digest indicated substantial growth totaling 8.8 percent representing close to \$6 million dollars in new tax revenue.

What do those statistics mean to Savannahians?

It means our coaches can focus on the X's and O's that have real impact on your life.

It means we can invest \$1.8 million in recreation facility enhancements, install 41 new traffic calming measures, resurface over 21 miles of roadways, clean over 1,000 acres of our historic parks and squares each month removing an average of 37.6 tons of trash and litter, and plant 500 new trees keeping our historic urban canopy alive and thriving.

A \$600 million balanced budget means we can increase starting salaries for our police force to \$60,350 and provide a 3% cost of living adjustment for all of Team Savannah so we attract and maintain five-star recruits.

A good economy and sound budgeting and finance decisions means we can build 39 new cottages and 16 brand new apartments for folks exiting homelessness.

Our key players in the award-winning Office of Budget and Management not only presented a balanced budget last year but recommended we keep the lowest millage rate since 1987 reducing property taxes for over 20,000 qualified households.

That's where you clap.

We cannot be an efficient government without the budgeting work of players like Melissa Carter, now Interim Chief of Community Services, who led our budgeting process last year.

Or interim Senior Director of Budget Sancia Joseph-Jarvis and her team of analyst. Or David Maxwell in financial services.

These are some of the stars of Team Savannah that I want to highlight tonight.

Savannah is winning in all three phases of the game. And I am going to tell how we are doing it.

First, let's take a look at the offense.

Roll the tape.

**—First Half Report [2024-2025]—**

### ***Offense Video***

A good offense has strong position players, a great game plan, and, most importantly, can execute the plays.

**—Housing—**

A few weeks ago, on a beautiful sunny day in Savannah, the City and our partners cut the ribbon on the Dundee Cottages.

Savannah is not only winning the housing game, but we are setting trends nationally with our plays.

The 39 new cottages, caretaker's house, and resident services building will serve hundreds of families and individuals exiting homelessness for many years to come.

Those folks, our neighbors, our friends, will not only have a roof over their heads, but they will also have opportunity to receive health care, employment or education assistance, and a community of support around them.

Along with the 12 tiny homes already in service next door at the Cove at Dundee, this once vacant City property is now home to a new, vital city service that will address the real needs of our unhoused neighbors.

And soon, we will be celebrating the opening of 16 new two-bedroom apartments at 916 MLK which will also serve those folks facing homelessness.

These projects represent two of several currently underway and all guided by the Housing Savannah Action Plan to address the vital housing needs of our community.

The game plan for these initiatives started with the Housing Savannah Task Force, which led to the creation of the Savannah Affordable Housing Fund.

Through the SAHF, we have been able to provide for the construction of 61 new homes, service centers and infrastructure.

We have also been able to invest directly by providing rental assistance for 679 dwellings, homeowner home repairs for 586 dwellings, homebuyer assistance for 165 individuals, infill housing for 234 dwellings and acquired 72 blighted properties.

Indirect investments from SAHF have helped support applications for three low-income housing tax credits from the state. These tax credits will help developers build 41 new affordable apartments on Drayton Street in the coming year.

It takes a well-organized offense to execute these plays.

At the center of that huddle is Assistant City Manager Taffanye Young, whose birthday is tomorrow, and Senior Director of Housing Services Martin Fretty—long time all-stars in Savannah’s housing game.

On their team, Community Housing Service’s Anita Smith Dixon and the Homeless Authority’s Jennifer Dulong are key players who we cannot execute these plans without.

### **—Community Assets—**

While we take victory laps for focused and intentional new construction, we have not forgotten our precious public assets already standing.

During the first half of this term, this Council has not shied away from moving the play down the field and making big plays.

After years of robust public feedback, this Council determined the future of the Civic Center site with an even-handed, thoughtful approach that considers our past and our future.

Team Savannah is now in the planning stages for the future of the site. And thanks to you, the voters, we have the funds to move forward!

Last night, thanks to you, the Special Local Options Sales Tax or SPLOST 8 was approved. Among those projects at the top of our list is \$40 million dollars that will be directed to the Civic Center Legacy project.

And as a reminder, visitors to our city pay 40 percent of the SPLOST penny tax.

Beginning early next year, we will see the demolition of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Arena, beginning of a restoration project that marks one of the most dramatic transformations of our Historic District in modern time.

We will restore roadways, four tithing lots and two trust lots as originally designed by General Oglethorpe. And to ensure that we create a viable and equitable future, Council has directed that the restored land retain Dr. King's legacy and name,

prioritize affordable and workforce housing and prohibit hotels and short-term vacation rentals.

Additionally, we will restore the Johnny Mercer Theatre and community meeting rooms to be both a center for public use and a world-class entertainment venue.

This Council is not only moving the ball down the field we are making historic plays. The Civic Center Legacy project is an offensive drive for the ages.

We cannot execute those plays without leaders like Senior Director of Planning and Urban Design Bridget Lidy and Interim Senior Director of Capital Projects and Real Estate Cristy Lawrence.

This team has put emphasis on honoring the legacy of our historic City. For the first time in 118 years, we are restoring the seat of our government, “The People’s House.”

Our magnificent City Hall was completed in 1906 with the intent of being a symbol of the modern and progressive spirit embraced by the leaders of the time.

The first restoration project of Council Chambers embodied that same spirit. The ongoing project honors the historic architecture of the building that houses your City servants, while ensuring we have the modern capabilities to be an efficient government.

At the center of that restoration was our Municipal Archives Officer Luciana Spracher [Lou-Cha-Nuh Spray-Ker], who saw the importance of preserving the legacy of the building and ran with the ball. Joining her on that march downfield was Capital Project Manager Byron Stiles.

One mile south of City Hall, our Senior Director of Parks and Tree Gordon Denney also saw a need. Gordon and his team identified another Savannah icon in need of a restoration.

Although it was still operational, the 167-year-old Forsyth Fountain was in need of a full restoration. Gordon and his team, including Historic Squares Division Director Brent Boyd, spearheaded the first major restoration of the fountain since 1988.

And soon, we will celebrate that big play with a ceremony to turn the fountain back on. Stay tuned fountain fans.

Forsyth Park is the gem of our city, an iconic public asset that draws millions of locals and visitors every year. During this first half, we have also focused on enhancing and improving our recreation facilities.

Through Recreation ReImagined, this year we have resurfaced 13 basketball courts, 16 tennis courts, installed three new splash pads, one new playground and completed numerous upgrades to fields, parks, and pools.

And again, thanks to your vote yesterday, SPLOST will fund over 12 million dollars in future recreation facility upgrades.

Leading that effort has been Senior Director of Recreation and Leisure Nick Roberts. Nick leads an incredible team of players like Peter Maierhofer, Ricky Allison, and Iris King in what we call the Department of Fun.

These are just a part of the all-stars on the field every day, executing plays with precision.

Coming soon, our hall-of-fame players on Team Savannah will lead efforts to restore other key public assets like the Gamble Building and the Water Works Building.

### **—Government Operations—**

At the core of what makes a strong government team is the performance level of its services.

The City of Savannah provides key services for nearly 150,000 residents that impact the nearly 400,000 people in our region.

Our Water Resources Department serves 79,000 sewer customers and over 80,000 metered water customers and maintains over 900 miles of sewer pipes, 1,000 miles of water pipes and 400 miles of our stormwater drainage system.

Our Government Operations service center is in the service trenches day in and day out. Our sanitation department made 5.3 million scheduled refuse and yard waste collections for 51,000 customers last year at a 99 percent completion rate.

Street sweepers cleaned over 32,000 miles of curbs last year. Our crews cleaned 1,200 miles of right-of-way greenscapes and over 800 miles of medinas, and 170 miles of canals and ditches.

And as part of our commitment to be environmentally conscience, Sanitation processed 6,500 tons of curb-side recycling while the Dean Forest Landfill scored a 100 on their environmental compliance test with Georgia EPD.

Our 311 Call Center fielded more than 43,000 requests for service in the last year, answering more than 41,000 calls. Through our new translation software, 311 handled more than 500 calls from our Hispanic community this year. That is what equality looks like in action.

Leading that effort was all-star Sarah Torres and her incredible 311 Team.

We are running the type of offense that not only scores touchdowns but ensures that our City is clean and beautiful for everyone.

Through the City's partnership with Keep Savannah Beautiful, we hosted 146 community cleanups with 1,563 volunteers putting in 3,969 hours.

Executing those plays are leaders like Senior Director of Sanitation Quannah Andrews [Que-On-Uh] and Project Manager Carliss Bates.

**—Economic Development/Human Services—**

Service of our enterprise customers is key but serving our community with opportunity leads to a win for everyone.

Most recently, we celebrated the graduation of the second cohort of Launch Savannah, a comprehensive business accelerator program.

This 12-week program provides intensive training for small, local, and minority business owners.

The City's champion of local business, Senior Director of Economic Development MarRonde Lumpkin-Lotson leads the Launch Savannah program and many other programs that help secure the future of our local economy.

Earlier this year, our human services department launched the Community Advancement Leadership Institute.

This program provided more than 60 free and affordable leadership training sessions to 734 attendees this year. We had

66 neighborhood associations participate in our mini-conferences which provided a space for networking and cross-neighborhood collaboration.

This bold initiative builds our community by bolstering individuals and organizations through a broad spectrum of educational classes. Quarterbacking those operations is Director of Human Services Keri Ried and Assistant Director Dr. Antionette Williams.

While we invest in people with strong schemes, we also must look to the infrastructure that carries us through the City each day.

### **—Planning and Design—**

Part of our offensive plan moving forward must consider the way people move through our City. Earlier this year, the beginning stages of a new offensive scheme took shape in our Planning and Economic Development Service Center.

Savannah MOVES will be the first city-wide, multi-modal transportation plan that will be a green print for future mobility.

MOVES' first action plan, now in the planning stages, will be an assessment and project recommendations for the River Street Renovation that will be paired with the Savannah Waterfront Community Improvement District's vision plan.

We will overhaul River Street, Bay Street and Factor's Walk with an aim towards boosting mobility and spurring economic growth while improving safety, equity, and sustainability.

This kind of forward progression down the field can only happen if we have first secured the right coaches to call the plays.

Savannah MOVES is being led by Chief of Planning and Economic Development Faye DiMassimo who was appointed during this first half.

While our offense continues to make big drives, score on huge plays and put up stats, you cannot win the game in just one phase.

Every good team needs a strong defense.

Let's go back to the tape.

*Defense Video*

**—Government Operations—**

A good defense is composed of several elements.

Preparedness and response are two vital keys to keeping our city running no matter what comes our way.

We were extremely fortunate this hurricane season. But in years past, our team had to defend against major tropical storms.

This year, we experienced something different to kickoff the year: snow. A lot of snow, for Savannah anyways.

Like Josh Allen and the Buffalo Bills in December at home, we plowed through 3 inches of snow and ice and lows below freezing for multiple days during this hundred-year winter storm.

Multiple Service Centers across the city came together in the trenches. Government Operations, Planning and Economic Development, Water Resources, Information and Public Affairs, Savannah Police and Savannah Fire stood up emergency operations.

We prepared by pre-treating roadways alongside our partners at Georgia Department of Transportation. With our community partners, we opened warming centers for our unhoused neighbors before and during the event.

And after all that snow and cold, we still collected garbage and recycling, cleared roadways so folks could get to work, and kept our 311 Call Center active for service requests.

Strong coaching. Strong preparedness. Strong response.

That is what good government looks like and that is the secret sauce of champions.

Seven months after a rare extreme snow storm, Team Savannah had to defend against another symptom of climate change: rain. A lot of rain.

In August, the National Weather Service recorded 11.79 inches of rainfall. The 30-year average for the month is 6.79 inches. Comparative data from Weather Underground showed that some areas received more than 20 inches of rain.

That amount of rain had a heavy impact on our water, sewer, and stormwater drainage systems. As the water table increased, we saw more cave-in's and stormwater infiltration of our sewer system.

In August, the Stormwater Management Department received double the normal annual work orders. In all of 2024, the department received around 500 work orders. By November of this year, they 1,362. Of those requests, 1,103 have been closed.

On that defensive play was Chief Feldner and Stormwater Management Senior Director Zack Hoffman. Together, they brought in support from contracted VAC units to clear drainage systems, borrowed equipment from Park and Tree to increase

ditch and canal mowing, and conducted hundreds of tests and repairs on hundreds of miles of pipes to get the job done.

We must continue to invest in our water/sewer/stormwater infrastructure. Savannah floods. But each year, we are getting better at defending against it.

Once again, thank you to the voters yesterday, we now have \$60 million of future SPLOST funds for major capital stormwater projects.

But, the regular maintenance of our stormwater system is a vital component to defending against extreme weather and flooding. For years, staff have indicated that the City needs a dedicated fund for those services.

Next week, Water Resources will be holding a second round of community meetings on the proposed Stormwater Utility. This new utility will fund, through a user fee, will focus funds on the maintenance and water quality of our stormwater system and provide supplemental funds for capital project needs.

We invite you to attend of our upcoming meetings beginning on Monday November 10. Look out for details on those meetings on our website and social media channels.

It's not always major projects that have a major impact on our water and sewer infrastructure.

This year, Water Resources installed eight new litter booms on key waterways that will prevent an estimated 4,500 pounds of trash annually from entering our waterways.

And most recently, Water launched the second phase of the Storm Drain Art project combining art and education to help keep our storm water drainage systems clear.

These initiatives may seem small, but their impact is mighty.

### **—Sustainability—**

As our climate changes, we must adapt. We must be good stewards of our natural resources.

We must embrace sustainable technology that improves our climate, creates equality, and enhances our efficiency.

Under the 100 percent Savannah Plan, drawn up and approved by Council four years ago, that is exactly what we are doing.

In 2022, the City partnered with Cherry Street Energy to implement a renewable energy plan for municipal facilities.

As of July this year, the City has installed 1,709 kilowatts of solar capacity across 27 sites saving over 100,000 dollars in electricity costs in the last year.

Since last summer, our renewable energy plan has replaced over 1.6 million kilowatts of electricity with clean energy. That's

enough to power 209 homes or offset 254 gas vehicles. It matches the carbon offset of over a 1,000 acres of forest.

We have lowered our carbon dioxide emissions by over 1,000 metric tons becoming a municipal leader in the transition to renewable energy.

Our Office of Sustainability also contracted with McKinstry to pursue 1.9 million dollar investment in infrastructure and energy efficiency upgrades throughout 28 city facilities which will translate to over \$3.5 million in expected savings over the next 20 years.

We have also added 36 light duty Electric Vehicles to our fleet and more than 50 electric vehicle chargers to the overall City infrastructure. More than 40 of those chargers are also available for public use.

That is a powerful defense against a changing climate that has and will impact us all in ways seen and unseen.

That work cannot happen without all-stars like Sustainability Officer Nylah Oliver and Program Coordinator Joshua Corning.

### **—Planning and Design—**

As we continue to react to the changing climate and a changing economy, this Council has ensured we harness the growth of our region now to better our position for any future that may come.

Last year, the City implemented a new development Impact Fee. Since the fee's inception in July of 2023, the City has assessed nearly 11 million dollars in development impact fees and collected nearly 7 million.

Since July of this year, the City has assessed 788,768 dollars composed of \$461,968 dollars in commercial permits and \$326,710 dollars in residential permits.

That is money from new development projects that will go straight to improving roads, public safety, parks and recreation.

Simply put, when a developer builds a new warehouse the city paves roads. When SCAD builds a new dorm, the City builds a new playground.

That is a defensive play working for the public by harnessing the energy of growth to generate equality and better quality of life for all.

### **—Transportation Safety—**

Part of the downfield action of that play has impacted the streets that carry us all from home to work, to play, and back again.

Under our Vision Zero plan, we are working to eliminate all traffic-related deaths and serious injuries, create safer streets

for all road users, and increase accessibility and equality in transportation.

This year, we reduced speed limit on more than 75 roadways across the city because slower vehicles create safer roads for everyone.

Since February, the Transportation Department has installed more than 400 new or updated speed limit signs on nearly 100 streets and added two new school zones.

In the coming years, you will see transformative projects on E. President St. 37<sup>th</sup> Street, MLK, Bay, Liberty, E. Broad and Montgomery that will enhance pedestrian walkways, improve or add bicycle lanes and ensure vehicle travel is safe for all.

The initiatives we are putting into place work. The stats don't lie. SPD reported to Council earlier this year that fatalities and serious injury collisions are both trending downward.

In July of this year, we dropped from three average of 15 deaths per year to only 5. And since 2023 when the SPD recorded 44 serious injuries, we have trended downward to 31 last year and 26 this year. But as we know, just one traffic related fatality or serious injury is one too many.

In addition to enhancing intersections and over 20 miles of resurfaced roadways, Transportation is addressing roadway failures through the new Pothole Patrol initiative.

Later this year, we will unveil the name of our new pothole patrol vehicle and then it will get to work filling in holes faster than nose tackle Dexter Lawrence sacks quarterbacks.

Driving that work is Senior Director of Transportation Stephen Henry and Vision Zero Coordinator Harold Taylor.

### **—Public Safety—**

And when it comes to defense and safety, the City of Savannah has one of the best public safety teams on the planet.

During the first half of this Council term, we have invested heavily in the Savannah Police Department. Public safety is the first word in our mission statement and first goal of new strategic plan, Savannah GPS.

It is first because it matters most.

And our investments are paying off. As of October 25, overall crime in Savannah is down 3 percent, shootings are down 17 percent, property crime is down by 3 percent and our homicide unit is clearing cases at a 75 percent clip.

To date, SPD has recorded 25 homicides in Savannah. Of those homicides 28 percent were domestic and 72 percent non-domestic. We have seen these numbers move downward from a high of 34 in 2021, we still have work to do.

This year, I personally responded to numerous troubling incidents in our community including the shooting at Oglethorpe Mall. We must continue to work together to create a community where everyone feels safe in their neighborhoods, their homes, and in public places like our malls and shopping centers.

But we are taking active steps to address crime. Three years ago, the City recruited a special prosecutor to be placed in The Southern District of Georgia Courts to handle federal offenses.

This year, our Special U.S. Attorney Makeia Jonese is currently handled 50 open cases and has secured 23 federal indictments including major convictions of serious criminals.

And when the data showed us there was a problem, we acted.

Last year, City Council unanimously approved a new ordinance that addressed firearms in unlocked vehicles. In 2024, there 245 guns stolen from unlocked vehicles in Savannah. We know that these firearms are being stolen and used in crimes. So we acted to defend the public's safety.

Since the ordinance's inception, we have issued 41 citations, 30 of those this year alone. This year, 153 guns have been reported stolen from vehicles. 106 from unlocked vehicles and 47 from locked vehicles. In one year, we have seen a nearly 40 percent decline in firearms being stolen from unlocked vehicles. Almost 100 less stolen guns on Savannah streets.

That is a good, legal, defensive play no matter how many flags were tossed on the field.

Public safety is a public responsibility. To that aim, two summers ago we rolled out a new list. It's not a list you want to find yourself on.

Top 10 Most Wanted list, comprised of the most egregious suspected criminals in our community, has been wildly successful. Thanks to your tips and your calls, of the 100 people who have made the list, 84 have been arrested. This year alone, SPD has arrested 27 subjects from the Top 10 List.

This is the power of a strong team defense and a community-minded approach to public safety.

For years, we saw crime rates increase in the summer months. The cross-departmental 100 Days of Summer initiative was launched using both community-oriented engagement and increased public safety protocols to address the problem.

At the close of this past summer, SPD reported to Council that the bold initiatives are taking over these 100 days are working. This year, we saw a decrease in total Part One crimes and shootings. Zooming in on the data, we saw some increases in a few particular crimes as well. We know there is work left to do.

Over the summer, our Savannah Impact Program engaged with hundreds of folks in the community, handing out 450 backpacks, 250 hygiene packs and built lasting positive impressions on young folks citywide.

The other arm of 100 Days of Summer, our Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, our ONSE office saw an 84.4 percent increase in summer programming participation over the last three years.

Alongside ONSE, the recreation and leisure services department saw 3,296 kids take part in their summer camps keeping them busy and out of trouble.

And in that mix was Super Bowl Champion and Savannahian Nolan Smith who held a football camp. Game recognizes game.

When it comes to the best of the best, Savannah has the best Fire Department in the country. An ISO Class-I accredited fire brigade that sets the standard for safety in our region. Savannah Fire responded to 654 fires this year including 131 structure fires.

To increase our defensive plan, SFD helped install 82 smoke detectors in residences, participated in 127 community events and interacted with over 8,000 residents at events.

But they also have saved lives. SFD initiated CPR with 164 people this year and administered 47 doses of Narcan.

This summer, SFD held Camp Ignite where 21 young ladies spent three days building teamwork, confidence, leadership skills while learning about firefighting. In just a few short years, we have seen the incredible impact this program has had.

Preparedness is key to defense.

Internally, SFD strengthened its personnel 10 lateral advance firefighters graduating and celebrated 40 new promotions in key leadership roles.

The final phase of our game has been strong this year. A good offense and a good defense can only carry you so far.

Good Special Teams play can mean the difference between that W or that L.

Let's show that tape.

### ***Special Teams Video***

#### **—Regional Water Partnership—**

Earlier this year, the State of Georgia made a huge investment in our region.

At the center of that kickoff was the City of Savannah's Water Resources Department.

As our region grows, forecast models are clear: the demand for water will only grow. As the largest water utility in the region, Savannah and our neighboring municipal utilities needed to draw up a special teams play that addressed the need now instead of punting it down the road.

A new Regional Water Partnership was solidified at the state level and over 500 million dollars was invested in shoring up our capacity to handle the growth of the region. But at the center of this partnership was a focus on Savannah's water customers.

By helping our neighbors, we are helping ourselves and creating a lasting plan that ensures our water systems are redundant and we meet the coming demand while the financial burden of major infrastructure improvements does not land too heavy on the customer.

Without the work of Chief Feldner and our resident engineers Jim Laplander, Shawn Rosenquiest, and Dr. Bryan Shaw we would fall flat at the goal line.

### **—Public Art Master Plan—**

Utilities are vital to quality-of-life conditions, but so is art and culture.

This year, the City launched the first-ever Public Art Master Plan aimed at developing a comprehensive vision for integrating public art into the Savannah community.

Over the coming years, this master plan will shape and characterize our sense of place with thoughtfully implemented public art.

### **—912 Day—**

Public art is just one avenue in which we celebrate our city and community. Each September 12<sup>th</sup> we celebrate 912 Day.

Over the course of 10 days, Savannah showed out and showed love in a major way—with more than 18 events celebrating this year's 912 Day. From citywide scavenger hunts to neighborhood porch parties, from youth literacy to business leadership, the spirit of this year was truly special.

912 Day is more than a date. We have turned it into a movement centered on civic pride.

Savannah is the greatest city on earth. We have a lot to be proud of and a lot to celebrate.

But we must keep putting in the work.

Team Savannah is in the gym. They are on the practice field. They are ready to execute the plays at game time and get rings.

Public service is tough job. Sometimes the fans put bags on their head. We get yelled at a lot. It's easy to go on Facebook and complain about the government and then sit back and do nothing about it.

It's much harder to show up when it really counts. Team Savannah shows up. They put it all on the line every day to make sure when you turn on the faucet you have clean, beautiful water, to make sure your trash is collected every week and that you have incredible parks to enjoy.

Real winners play the game with grit. They show up ready when it counts the most.

Team Savannah are winners. They are at their computers and at the wheels of their vehicles at all hours of the day, working hard to ensure our championship program endures.

And now they have a new game plan.

### **—Savannah GPS—**

Over the second half of this Council's Term we will see the full implementation of our new strategic plan, Savannah GPS.

This is your city. Your future. Your voice. And Savannah GPS will guide our city to be an even better place to live, work, and thrive.

Built with robust feedback from the community and Council's direction, GPS is build on six goals:

- 1 – Increase Public Safety and our collective sense of security.
- 2 – Invest in Equitable Community Development and Resiliency
- 3 – Expand Economic Access, Opportunity and Vitality for all.
- 4 – Develop World Class Livable Environment and Infrastructure
- 5 – Improve quality of life by raising municipal service standards
- 6 – Always be a high-performing government.

### **—2026 Budget—**

In the coming weeks, we will invite the public to join us for our Budget Retreat as we prepare next year's financial guide. The budget is a moral document. We have a mandate from our residents to treat it as such.

Savannah GPS will be at the center of that conversation as workshop the most vital funding targets.

### **—2026 Budget—**

In the coming weeks, we will invite the public to join us for our Budget Retreat

### ***Closing Address***

We are at halftime, but there is a lot of game left to play.

Savannah, I encourage you to join us. Give us plays to run! Come to public meetings. Fill out surveys. This is still a democracy, and democracy is a participatory sport. Your input, your voice in Savannah still matters.

Tonight, you have the opportunity to interact with our Pro-Bowlers. They are outside in the vestibula waiting to talk to you. They want to hear from you.

Please don't leave without talking with Team Savannah tonight. Introduce yourself. Ask a question! Participate.

Help us create the future city you want to live in.

Savannah, Georgia will be a safe, environmentally healthy, and economically thriving community for all of its citizens.

And all means all. Amen and goodnight.

Thank you.