



## State of the City questions – Oct. 21, 2020

1. The unanimous vote in March to commit to 100% clean energy by 2035 was a big step. However, with all that's been going on lately, I haven't heard anything else about it. The interim target of 30% clean energy by 2025 is coming up very quickly. Have you and the members of the city council started to work on the clean energy action plan? Will there be any upcoming virtual town halls to discuss this? Will there be another home solar initiative?
  - a. **Virtual town halls will start on Nov. 11 and will be held by district with the respective council member. The Office of Sustainability presented information about this program during the City Council workshop on Oct. 22, 2020. The workshop presentation is available here: <http://agenda.savannahga.gov/publishing/october-22-2020-city-council-workshop/agenda.html>.**
2. I own a boutique on West Broughton between Jefferson and Montgomery. The road has been closed in front of my store ever since I was allowed to re-open May 1. I was told it would move on mid-June yet to date there is no end in sight. What is being done to help small businesses dealing with this construction and road closure and the pandemic on the West end of Broughton Street?
  - a. **Construction on the current section is expected to be completed on Nov. 16, 2020. The Broughton Street project faced challenges with underground work leading to construction delays. Business owners are invited to participate in regular virtual meetings with the project's community outreach coordinator. The most recent zoom meeting was held on Tuesday, Oct. 27 at 5:30 p.m. You'll find registration information for the next meeting, previous meeting presentations and contact details for the capital project manager and community outreach coordinator on the project website: [www.savannahga.gov/2988/Broughton-Streetscape](http://www.savannahga.gov/2988/Broughton-Streetscape)**
3. Savannah relies, in part, on the quality of life to attract new businesses and their families and tourism to generate a considerable economic impact. As a consequence of the pandemic, few industries are suffering as much today and will continue to suffer, like arts and culture. To that end, what can the City of Savannah do about investing more time, effort, and money into the arts and cultural industry for a quicker rebound?
  - a. **Annually, the city awards funds to local organizations to provide programming, and the city worked with these organizations to modify programs to provide services despite the pandemic. More in-person programming will become available when local COVID-19 conditions allow. City council will look over budgets for the next fiscal year during an upcoming budget retreat in November.**
4. How long will the mask mandate last?

- a. Until further notice.**
5. I am teaching from home. I and my students consistently receive Zoom messages regarding poor signal strength. I pay for the best internet package Comcast offers, but I rarely get speeds approaching 20% of what they advertise even if I hardwire my laptop directly to their modem. (I also pay for the best data plan offered by Verizon, but the results I am able to achieve on my iPad are marginal at best.) I live five minutes from Oglethorpe Mall—that's not exactly the middle of nowhere. Comcast has a total monopoly here, and they do not deliver what they promise. My students in Pooler have several better options, including fiber. What are our plans to update the digital infrastructure within the city of Savannah? Customer service complaints about Comcast?
- a. About four years ago, the City partnered on a municipal broadband strategic plan with Chatham County, and Comcast made some additional enhancements as a result. The City of Savannah lacks a strong fiber backbone, which limits opportunities for things like public Wi-Fi. In recent years, the city has partnered with private entities, such as SCAD, to help increase connectivity, but it's limited to the downtown area right now. We're currently looking for ways to enhance these efforts, and around \$2 million in SPLOST funding is allocated to help create a fiberoptic backbone in the city. The city is always looking for opportunities to improve the digital highway for citizens to access the Internet. We partner whenever possible with both local and national vendors to improve the fiber infrastructure of the city. We are also pursuing opportunities to delivery 5G wireless to our citizens as soon as it is possible. We are in discussions now to improve fiber access near the new arena and would like to duplicate that model elsewhere in the city.**
6. Can Mayor Johnson comment on Savannah's major crimes statistics? Is he satisfied with the way police handle major crimes in the city, and what will it take to decrease the amount of major crimes in the city?
- a. Part 1 crimes are down 21 percent this year, but gun-related crimes continue to be the biggest challenges. The Savannah Police Department is working proactively with members of the community to identify areas, people and incidents that are driving crime numbers. Strategic Investigations officers have taken more than 135 guns off the street this year. Community members are providing essential information to help police, and the Mayor asks the community to step up to partner with SPD to help reduce crime. Chief Roy Minter says officers also often encounter crime victims who are reluctant to help with the investigation or identify who committed the crime. SPD also realizes that about 6 to 7 percent of criminals in our community are responsible for 60 to 70 percent of our crime. This is why SPD continues to focus on known violent and repeat offenders.**
7. Why do residents of Southside Savannah, Wilshire Estates 31419 have to pay city and county taxes, and why do retired Savannah Residents still pay county taxes when the bulk of the tax is for schools and education? Most of the retired citizens put children through school and paid dearly through those years. Will Savannah Residents ever get a break? It seems as though most of the tax dollars go downtown anyway. The Southside gets very little of those tax dollars. I am 66 and disabled since I was in my 50s. I am now retired. Will my wife and I ever get a break, or do we need to leave the state of Georgia?

- a. Taxable properties located within the city limits of Savannah are subject to pay property taxes for services delivered by the City of Savannah and Chatham County and, thus, pay two millage rates. The City of Savannah property taxes cover the cost of municipal services such as police and fire protection, streets and drainage maintenance, and leisure services such as senior centers. The Chatham County property taxes cover services provided on a county-wide basis such as the Chatham County jail, public safety costs such as county courts, the district attorney’s office and the public defender’s office. All taxable property in Chatham County also pays property taxes to the Savannah-Chatham County Board of Education to support the cost of educating young people in the county. Though not every citizen has a child attending public schools, an educated society benefits all citizens and improves the quality of life for all generations. As such, current laws require all taxable property to pay property taxes to the school board. The City of Savannah does offer certain property tax exemptions for veterans, elderly and disabled. More information about these programs and enrollment requirements can be obtained from the Chatham County Tax Assessor’s office. These programs are similar to the homestead exemption many owner-occupied properties enjoy.**
- 8. Burial Grounds are located at Calhoun and Whitefield Squares. Will city officials address a request to honor those enslaved residents buried here and will the names of squares be changed?**

  - a. According to historical research compiled by the City of Savannah Municipal Archives to date, the “Negro Burial Ground” was located west of what is now Whitefield Square and the “Strangers Burial Ground” (also referred to as Potter’s Field) was located east of what is now Calhoun Square. They were both laid out in the Town Common prior to the squares being laid out. In 1844, both burial grounds were closed to new burials as they had reached capacity. Remains were relocated to Laurel Grove Cemetery after it opened in the 1850s, with the City paying \$722 to remove the interments from the “Negro Burial Ground” in 1855. The Municipal Archives continues to research the history of both burial grounds and share that information with individuals and groups working on historical marker initiatives to honor the sites of the former burial grounds. Parties interested in the city considering the renaming of public property should follow the procedure outlined in the Savannah City Code, Part 4, Chapter 1, Article E. Naming and Renaming of Public Property, Facilities and Streets.**
- 9. Efforts to combat human trafficking**

  - a. The Savannah Police Department is a member of a statewide Georgia Bureau of Investigations (GBI) human trafficking taskforce and a federal Homeland Security taskforce. SPD officers and supervisors also receive regular training on awareness and investigation of human trafficking. SPD regularly participates in the Savannah Inter-agency Diversity Council (SIDC) Traffick Jam conference held annually at Savannah State University. It is one of the largest human trafficking education and awareness conferences in the state of Georgia.**

