CITY COUNCIL BUDGET MEETING #2

AUGUST 04, 2025 AT 10:00 AM

COMMUNITY ROOM - 1859 CITY CENTER WAY, JONESBORO, GA 30236

MINUTES

I. CALLED TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by City Clerk Jewett at 10:09 a.m.

II. ROLL CALL

- Mayor Donya L. Sartor
- Mayor Pro-Tem Tracey Messick (Left meeting at 12:23 p.m.)
- Councilmember Alfred Dixon
- Councilmember Don Dixon (Left meeting at 1:44 p.m.)
- Councilmember Bobby Lester (Left meeting at 1:49 p.m.)
- Councilmember Asjah Miller (Arrived at 10:14 a.m.)
- Councilmember Billy Powell (Left meeting at 1:32 p.m.)
- City Clerk, Shandrella Jewett
- City Attorney, David Dreyer
- Downtown Development Manager, Andrew Simpson
- Economic Development Manager, Faith Akuta
- Finance Director, Donnetta Cannady
- Police Chief, Christopher Cato
- Public Works Director, Marcus Heard
- Department Heads: Court Services - Laterrial Francis, Operation/HR - Maria Wetherington

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Council to discuss FY 2026 Budget.

Budget Presentation by Mayor Sartor:

- "What is a Millage Rate?"
  (Example: 1 mill = $1 for every $1,000 of your property)
  (Example 1: Home assessed at $5,000.00, at 1 mill the City would collect $5.00)
  (Example 2: Home assessed at $10,000.00, at 1 mill the City would collect $10.00)
  Taxed on the home assessed market value.
- 2024 Notice of Property Tax Increase Advertisement
- 2024 Millage Rate and 5-Year History Advertisement
- City Center Building Debt Repayment Plan
- FY 26 Proposed Budget - Mayor Sartor stated she had met with department heads to assess their department-specific needs, operational requirements, and priorities.
- Debt Services of $617,000.00
- Three (3) Projects - Broad Street (the old fire station), Lee Street Park, and the City Center

- SPLOST Revenue in 2023 - 2027 (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax)

The Payoff Plan for the City Center:

Mayor Sartor explained that the previous City Council, in 2019, had committed to paying off the City Center building. To support this effort, she said they agreed to raise the millage rate by either 0.5 or 1 mill and supplement the funding with revenue from SPLOST and municipal bonds. Mayor Sartor emphasized that the City must now compensate for the year it went backwards, and the year in which nothing was done. She stressed the importance of realigning the City's financial strategy by increasing the millage rate. According to the City Charter, debt services must be incorporated into the annual budget.

Georgia Fund 1:

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick inquired about the current balance of Georgia Fund 1. She asked Mr. Ed Wall to share information regarding Georgia Fund 1 with the residents. Mr. Wall stated, the last audit conducted in 2022 showed a balance of $5.5 million and was earning an annual interest rate of 4.37%. However, he was uncertain about the current balance. Mayor Sartor assured Council that she would provide the balance as soon as possible. Mr. Wall clarified that Georgia Fund 1 represents a one-time capital expenditure rather than a recurring cost.

The Rainy-Day Reserve:

Mr. Wall noted what he calls the rainy-day reserve had previously been higher, but funds were allocated to projects such as the City Center, Lee Street Park, and the Old Fire Station. He confirmed the Fund Balance is equivalent to the rainy-day reserve. Mayor Sartor clarified that the rainy-day reserve he was referencing is the same as the fund balance. She shared that the City had to pull $3 million during the pandemic. She asked Mr. Wall, "How much operating budget should always be left?" He stated, "for a town of our size, there should always be 50% of the annual budget amount in the rainy-day reserve."

FY 26 Budget Discussion:

Mayor Sartor introduced Ed Wall of Piper Sandler Companies and Karen Slaton-Dixon of JATAXS Consulting Services, LLC. Mr. Wall stated, "I have worked alongside Ms. Slaton-Dixon for 25 years, and she is very competent and knowledgeable about her job.

FY 26 proposed budget was created based on a tentative 11 millage rate. The millage rate determines the revenue. Mr. Wall and Ms. Slaton-Dixon made a recommendation for Mayor and Council to go higher than the current millage rate of 8.5 mills. Ms. Slaton-Dixon stated that 11 mills would place the City at $2.4 million over what the City collected in 2024. Therefore, the City would be projected to collect $2.1 million in property taxes for the FY 26 Budget. The projected budget for FY 26 is at an estimated $9,249,166.00.

Mr. Wall recommended a 12.5 millage rate for the City of Jonesboro. He shared the millage rates of the following cities.

- 8.5 mills – City of Jonesboro
- 11.1 mills – City of Union City
- 12.5 mills – City of Riverdale
- 12.399 mills – City of South Fulton
- 12.6 mills – City of College Park
- 15.209 mills – City of Hapeville
- 16.743 mills – City of Forest Park

Salary Compensation Study:

Mayor Sartor stated the vast majority of employees are being paid under the national and state salary requirements. However, giving staff a proposed 2% raise is very conservative.

Based on current inflation, staff should have been given 5%, which was the original recommendation.
Positions that are held up (meaning they have not been included in the proposed FY 26 Budget) are: Four Police Officers, Probation Officer, Records Clerk, General Laborer III, two General Laborers in the Public Works Dept., Code Enforcement Officer, moving the receptionist to part-time, as well as an Executive Assistant.

Capital Improvements:
Mayor Sartor spoke regarding the Public Works Department. She stated, "There is a huge capital investment the City needs to make in the Public Works Department." She recommended an option to move money from the General Fund to cover some of the expenses or increase the millage rate to 12 mills. She stated, "I am hoping for at least 11 mills."

Mayor Sartor asked Council to consider a dollar amount for Public Works Department, Massingale Park, and Battleground Park. The focus over the next five (5) years is to have enough capital improvement funds to renovate, rehabilitate, and bring park safety requirements up to code, along with all the different assets the City owns. A Capital Improvement Plan will be put in place to cover a 5-10 year span.

Funded Positions:
Mayor Sartor said, in order to make the budget, it would include staff cuts, even at 11 mills. She distributed a document titled "Funded Positions" as of 07/29/25.

Fund Balance:
Mayor Sartor stated she would go into fund balance for necessary capital improvements that impact the quality of service the City provides and salary for staff.

At 11:20 a.m. Ed Walls left the meeting.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick asked if the documents received today were different from the July 25, 2025 Budget Meeting documents. Ms. Slaton-Dixon said the only changes made were to the salaries and benefits, social security, medicare, and increased debt services.

Mayor Sartor asked Council and staff if they had any questions.

Councilmember Powell had no comments. He stated that he did not have time to review the documents from the last budget meeting.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick expressed a desire to review each department's budget individually to determine what was necessary and what could be adjusted or removed.

Councilmember Miller expressed her concerns regarding park safety, and she provided feedback regarding the proposed budget.

Councilmember D. Dixon provided feedback regarding the proposed budget.

Mayor Sartor stated that the budget and millage rate approval does not have to run simultaneously. At this time Council begin to go page by page in regard to the proposed FY 26 Budget.

Group Insurance (1500-51-2100):
Councilmember D. Dixon asked for a final cost on the Group Insurance. The City spent $111,371.15 in 2024. The remaining balance was $14,000.00. He wanted to know why it goes up in each department when there is money left over. Mayor Sartor said she will get back to Council regarding this matter.

Fulton & Kozak:
Councilmember D. Dixon asked why there was a proposed budget of $45,000.00 for Fulton & Kozak. Mayor Sartor said this has to stay the same until the City gets an RFP.
Proposed Staff Adjustments:

Economic Development Manager position:

- Mayor Sartor stated that the Economic Development Manager position would be rolled over to the Community Development Director.
- Councilmember Miller said the Economic Development Manager position is needed and should be filled for FY 26.
- Councilmember Powell said he doesn't think the City needs this position.
- Mayor Pro-Tem Messick asked if the Community Development Director could do the task of a Economic Development Director
- Faith Akuta spoke about the difference between a Community Development Director and an Economic Development Manager.
- Councilmember D. Dixon asked what the salary would be for an Economic Development Manager. Mayor Sartor replied $65,000.00 to $75,000.00. He said he is okay with keeping the position.
- Councilmember A. Dixon said the City definitely needs this position.
- Councilmember Lester said he is okay with the position as long as there is progress.
- Mayor Sartor asked Ms. Slaton-Dixon to add the Economic Development Manager to the FY 26 Budget.

Downtown Development Manager:

- Andrew Simpson, Downtown Development Manager, would make $75,000.00 and the City would need to add the Economic Development Manager position.

Executive Assistant to the Mayor and to the City Manager:

- Mayor Sartor said she would remove the position of Executive Assistant to the Mayor.

Grant Writer:

- Councilmember A. Dixon said the City definitely needs a Grant Writer.

Police Department:

- Police Chief Cato said if an Assistant Police Chief position is not budgeted for FY 26, then he would want two lieutenants.
- Three (3) positions are available to be filled.
- Mayor Pro-Tem Messick said she is okay with adding two (2) officers to the FY 26 Budget.
- Mayor Sartor said to add two officers to the budget.

At 12:22 p.m., Mayor and Council paused the meeting for a break.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick left the meeting during the break.
The meeting resumed at 12:51 p.m. by City Clerk Jewett, per the direction of Mayor Sartor.
Mayor Sartor re-joined the meeting at 1:23 p.m.

At this time, Council had dialogue regarding the following matter.

Public Works Department:

- General Laborer III – Director Heard said he is not sure if the position has been filled.
- Director Heard explained that General Laborer I's are entry-level positions and 2's are skilled (operating machinery)
- Police Chief Cato said General Laborer III have a mechanical skill set.

- Councilmember Lester said the City needs a mechanic as the General Laborer III position.
- Councilmember Miller inquired about the salary range of a General Laborer III position. (weed control, blowers, edgers, vehicle, equipment, oil changes, tires, etc.). She asked Director Heard to look over the job description to ensure everything is present.
- The General Laborer III would bring their own personal tools.
- Councilmember D. Dixon agrees that the City needs a General Laborer III and for Mayor Sartor to let them know the costs involved.
- Councilmember Powell asked if the General Laborer III person would have a work-station.
- Councilmembers Miller, Lester, D. Dixon, A. Dixon, and Powell were in favor of adding the General Laborer III position.
- The Assistant Public Works Director position was changed to Building Maintenance Supervisor.
- Director Heard made a request to keep the General Laborer I's and to make the General Laborer II's more supervisory.
- Police Chief Cato said the City of Morrow's salary is $25-$27 per hour for their mechanic.

Court Department:

- Court Administrator Francis noted a discrepancy on the budget documents, and the Office of the Mayor agreed to update it. The 2025 salary was listed in the FY 26 column. The FY 25 salary should be where FY 26 number was located.

Code Enforcement Officer:

- Police Chief Cato said that Bryant Robinson is the Code Enforcement Officer.
- The Code Enforcement Officer would be placed under the Public Works Department.
- Director Heard said they have seven (7) General Laborer I's as of today. Their pay is $19.47 per hour.
- General Laborer II positions are filled
- Councilmember Miller said if the Code Enforcement Department remains at one person, then it would be a problem if that person left the organization.
- As of 2013, the Code Enforcement Department was moved under City Hall and reported to the City Manager. Recently, it was moved under the Police Department and under Police Policy. Police Chief Cato said he will let Mayor and Council know if the position should remain under the Police Department or go under City Hall.
- Some Council agreed to put the Code Enforcement Officer back into the budget, but this would put the City at 11.5 mills.

Councilmember Powell said, "we need a millage rate before we do the proposed budget."

Councilmember Lester said, "grant money and SPLOTS would take care of the building."

Councilmember D. Dixon spoke on behalf of individuals on fixed income and social security. He shared that the cost of everything is going up. However, people's social security income remains the same.

Councilmember Miller requested the minutes that reflect what the City's plan were for the City Center as it relates to raising the millage rate by .5 or 1 mill each year.

At this time, Mayor Sartor re-joined the meeting at 1:23 p.m.

Councilmember Miller said there should be safeguards in place should something big happen.

Mayor Sartor stated that Councilmember Lester and Powell had voted to build the City Center, and this should not be left on the back of the employees and another administration to pay for it. Councilmember Powell said he does not recall a previous agreement to raise the millage rate incrementally to pay for the City Center. Mayor Sartor asked how the building was going to get paid.

Councilmember Powell left the meeting at 1:32 p.m.

After the above discussion, Mayor Sartor asked that the budget be built on 10.78 mills (without contingency) and to include debt service. The Charter states that the budget must include debt service. The only millage rate that would cover debt service is probably a 10.75 mills, with no contingency. Mayor Sartor told Ms. Slaton-Dixon to build a budget that gives zero contingency but covers debt service.

Mayor Sartor went over the following options:

- Build a budget with no contingency and get the minimum millage rate to cover debt service.
- 11 mills and build a budget by pulling money out of the General Fund or 11 mills and have and have $500,000.00 in there.
- Go up as high as we want to go up and pull from General Fund.
- Build a budget on the least millage rate with no contingency (to include current positions that are cut).
- Go into General Fund and pull out $500,000.00, $750,000.00, or $1 million – Roll it over to revenue and build from there.

Councilmember A. Dixon said he was okay with 12.5 mills and to filling the positions.

Councilmember D. Dixon said he was okay with 9 mills and cutting the budget. He said the Election GL Account can be lowered.

Councilmember D. Dixon left the meeting at 1:44 p.m.

Mayor Sartor said she would build a budget at 10.8 mills and will get with staff to see where additional cuts can be made.

Councilmember Miller recommended building the budget with 11 or 12 mills.

Councilmember Lester left the meeting at 1:49 p.m.

FY 26 Budget is supposed to be approved by December 2025, and if not, it will roll over to the next year on a month-to-month basis.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m. meeting.

RESULT:	**Approved (Vote was unanimous)**
MOVER:	**Councilmember Miller**
SECONDER:	**Councilmember A. Dixon**

Dr. Donya L. Sartor, Mayor

Shandrella Jewett, City Clerk