CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL CALLED MEETING

DECEMBER 16, 2025 AT 10:00 AM

COUNCIL CHAMBERS - 1859 CITY CENTER WAY, JONESBORO, GA 30236

MINUTES

I. CALLED TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Mayor Sartor.

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called by City Clerk Jewett.

- Mayor Donya L. Sartor
- Mayor Pro-Tem Tracey Messick
- Councilmember Alfred Dixon
- Councilmember Don Dixon
- Councilmember Bobby Lester (Telephonic. Call dropped 10:22 p.m. Rejoined at 10:49 p.m.)
- Councilmember Asjah Miller
- Councilmember Billy Powell
- City Attorney, David Dreyer (Absent)
- City Clerk, Shandrella Jewett
- Community Development Interim Director, Faith Akuta
- Finance Director, Donnette Cannady
- Operation/Human Resource – Maria Wetherington
- Police Chief, Christopher Cato
- Public Works Director, Marcus Heard (Absent)

III. MAYOR'S PRESENTATION

A. Discussion concerning the City's financial transactions regarding Downtown Development Authority for January 1, 2025 to present.

Mayor Sartor spoke regarding a concept named a "Lame Duck". She said there's a concept named a "Lame Duck" is when elected officials are exiting out of office and therefore make decisions that financially obligate the incoming elected officials." She further stated that she was concerned about these last-minute Special Called Meetings to get things done in a rush and for decisions that would actually impact the incoming council.... particularly as it relates to financial burdens.

The statement below was read into the record by Mayor Sartor.

I want to make a brief statement for the record and for the citizens of Jonesboro as well as the business owners and employees that joined us today. I'm going to read into the record a Memorandum that addresses:

- The October 22, 2026 Ordinance that you'll hear a lot of reference to today

- The Downtown Development Authorities completed investigation
- The status of the City's retained investigator

I am doing so because of transparent and fiscal responsibility which require clarity at this particular point. The October 22nd Ordinance authorized a specific administrative investigation for a defined period of time. It was a very clearly defined purpose. To obtain facts regarding certain City and DDA financial transactions during a very limited period of time in 2025. Since that time, those facts have already been gathered and to some degree documented by the Downtown Development Authority, the entity with jurisdiction over those transactions.

In addition, the City's retained investigator has acknowledged that his engagement exceeded the scope of the ordinance and has faulted further activity. As explained in the memorandum that I'll read, the DDA conducted an investigation on the same issue and determined that there was no illegal or inappropriate management or use of funds. Once the authorized factual inquiry has been completed, continued investigation no longer serves a legitimate governmental purpose. Reauthorizing or repackaging an investigation to revisit known facts would result in unnecessary expenditure of taxpayers' funds. Any motion to move forward with this investigation would raise serious accountability concerns of the council members who supported the investigation as they will soon be leaving public office and will not oversee the outcome or the cost. They will no longer be held accountable for the blatant waste of taxpayers' dollars. For those reasons, I object to any further investigative action that is a duplicate, open-ended, or untethered from a present and defined governmental need.

I also want the record to reflect that aligning a scope of work with the ordinance does not resolve this issue or the issue of mutenance or cure the absence of a current governmental purpose. I hope that no further legal action is required. However, the City reserves all rights to seek appropriate judicial relief should public funds be expended on activity outside the authority granted by law. There are in fact checks and balances in our Charter. My job is to manage and protect the business of taxpayers and the general public, and I assure you that I intend to uphold the duties sworn to me. With that, I'd like to read the Memorandum into record. I assure you that I intend to uphold the duties sworn to me. With that, I'd like to read the memorandum into record.

At this time, the 12/12/25 Memorandum of Attorney Jackson was read into the record by Mayor Sartor. (See attached document)

IV. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Timothy Vondell Jefferson (Resident of Clayton County) – Spoke regarding transition and the transfer of power, internal conflict, and paying civil attorneys for illegal filings. He recommended a prayer of unity breakfast to be held in the community.

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. Council to discuss and consider action on amending the Letter of Engagement.

- Narrowing the scope of the investigation with Hall, Booth, Smith to align with Ordinance 2025-008 authorizing the investigation.

Mayor Sartor asked if there was any consideration to expand the scope.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick said the Council was intending to have the scope of the investigation on the Letter of Engagement narrowed to fit Ordinance 2025-008. Mayor Sartor asked if the attorney had submitted the revised Letter of Engagement. She replied, the attorney is waiting for Council to make a decision to move forward with that and then he'll submit it to the Council.

Mayor Sartor stated that per Ordinance 2025-008, the attorney was to investigate transactions between the City of Jonesboro and the Downtown Development Authority from January 1, 2025 to October 31, 2025.

Mayor Sartor noted at this time, Attorney Friduss had not provided any work towards the Ordinance. However, the City received $20,000.00 in legal expenses from Hall Booth Smith, P.C. of which none of these legal expenses will be attributed to a modified scope that he's going to provide.

At 10:21 p.m., Councilmember Lester call produced feedback, and his call was dropped on Councilmember D. Dixon's cell phone.

The first bill dated October 23, 2025 was for $6,452.00 and the second bill was for $14,707.00. That's almost $20,000.00 of outstanding civil attorney fees of work that was so far outside of the scope that we agreed upon.

Mayor Sartor spoke regarding a previous email where she asked Council to disclose who had spoken to the attorney. The attorney billed the City $3,412.00 for about 9 hours of work. This was for the attorney to prepare for and travel to and from Jonesboro for interviews with Mayor Pro-Tem Tracey Messick and the Downtown Development Chair, Santia Fox as initial formal interviews in the case. She stated that no other Council person has talked to this attorney. She further stated that the attorney's direction in a $20,000.00 bill was attributed to their interactions with the attorney. "The decisions that are made now for investigation, of which those facts have already been to a great extent investigated through a DDA Interim Report, also must be paid."

At this time, Mrs. Wetherington provided eight (8) transactions between the DDA and the City that needed to be investigated. Mayor Sartor asked Council if they wanted to review the eight transactions now to see if they have any concerns.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick asked for a copy of the transactions and said the investigation is not just about financials. She said it's about policy and procedure, administrative, etc. She said by narrowing the scope of the investigation, it would cut down considerably on any cost along with giving the community transparency. Mayor Sartor read parts of the Ordinance regarding, "The investigator shall conduct an administrative investigation into all financial transactions occurring from, to, and between the City of Jonesboro, Georgia and the Downtown Development Authority for fiscal year 2025 beginning January 1st and ending October 20, 2025." She said the investigator shall conduct the investigation pursuant to the requirements codified in Article V and VII, Administrative Investigation. The Article that defines Administrative Investigation does not define additional scope. It defines the method of the investigation. Administrative Investigation clearly defines how the investigation is occurring, but not the scope. Therefore, there is nothing in the Ordinance that says anything about policy and procedure. It clearly says all financial transactions.

A motion was made for Council to consider narrowing the scope of the investigation with Hall Booth Smith to align with Ordinance 2025-008 that authorized the investigation.

RESULT: **Motion Failed (Vote 3 to 3)**
MOVER: **Mayor Pro-Tem Messick**
SECONDER: **Councilmember D. Dixon**
AYES: **Mayor Pro-Tem Messick; Councilmembers D. Dixon and Powell**
NAYS: **Councilmembers A. Dixon and Miller**

Discussion: Councilmember Miller noted the amount of money that was already been spent, how much things cost, how the City should look into hiring someone else, and the DDA investigation. She further stated, "This is divisiveness and it's frustrating. The City of Jonesboro, Mayor included, Council included, don't want to harm the DDA. They are a

byproduct of us. So, we need to work together instead of wasting money that could be used for the City."

Mayor Sartor asked Mayor Pro-Tem Messick if Council intended on doing a motion on how much can be spent, if there will be a cap on how much could be spent, and where the money would come from. Mayor Pro-Tem Messick said the cost would come down considerably once the scope of the investigation is narrowed.

Mayor Sartor said for the record, "she did not allow a vote to move forward if they did not have a cost of how much it was going to cost."

At 10:41 p.m. Mayor Sartor called the vote:

- Councilmember A. Dixon – Voted Against
- Councilmember Miller – Voted Against
- Mayor Sartor – Voted Against
- Councilmember D. Dixon – Voted In Favor
- Mayor Pro-Tem Messick – Voted In Favor
- Councilmember Powell – Voted In Favor
- Councilmember Lester – No Vote. Phone called was previous disconnected at 10:22 p.m.

B. Funding and Hiring of Third-Party Legal Representation.

- Approval of seeking, selecting, and funding a third-party attorney to represent the six seated Council members during the investigation authorized by Ordinance 2025-008.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick said it was her understanding that Mayor Sartor had already employed her personal attorney, Ms. Jackson. Mayor Sartor said she had not employed her personal attorney for the record and that there was no Letter of Engagement.

At this time, 10:42 p.m. Councilmember D. Dixon made an attempt to get Councilmember Lester back on the phone but was unable to.

Mayor Sartor said she would entertain a motion for funding and hiring of a third-party legal representation to represent the current six seated council members. Mayor Pro-Tem Messick clarified this matter would need to be revisited once the new Council is sworn in so that they can be included as well.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick made a motion for Council to approve the hiring and funding of a third-party attorney (for Council) to match the amount of funding that Mayor Sartor would spend on her attorney. (Example: If Mayor Sartor's attorney cost $20,000.00, then Council would fund up to that same amount for Council's attorney).

Mayor Sartor clarified the motion by saying she would entertain a motion for funding and hiring all third-party legal representation as it relates to Ordinance 2025-08.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick spoke about removing Mayor Sartor's name from the motion. Mayor Sartor said she is entitled as a Mayor to have legal counsel for everything. She further stated that every elected official is advised to have legal representation. For the record, Mayor Sartor said she has not asked for any pay or compensation for her legal representation since the last legal interaction two and a half years ago. She said, "Let the record show for clarification that my legal attorney has not sought any compensation for any legal advice that she has provided."

At 10:49 p.m. Councilmember Lester joined the meeting again, via telephone.

Council to consider funding and hiring third-party representation for the six (6) seated Councilmembers and Mayor for the investigation authorized by Ordinance 2025-008 and no legal attorney can exceed the other.

RESULT:	**Approved (Vote was 5 to 2)**
MOVER:	**Mayor Pro-Tem Messick**
SECONDED:	**Councilmember D. Dixon**
AYES	**Mayor Pro-Tem Messick, A. Dixon, D. Dixon, Lester, and Powell**
NAYS	**Mayor Sartor and Councilmember Miller**

Councilmember Miller said Hall Booth Smith halted their investigation until they receive a narrow scope. If we don't give him a narrow scope, then what investigation is happening with the Ordinance. The motion to consider narrowing the scope had failed. Therefore, the attorney can't do any further work.

Mayor Sartor replied, if you look under New Business, there's going to be a discussion of subpoena powers for the investigator and it's just good practice that if any council member, mayor, or staff are interviewed in an investigation that they have legal counsel present. Councilmember Miller restated that the motion to narrow the scope had failed (see Item A under Old Business). Mayor Sartor agreed and said Item B was irrelevant because it was not related to something that could be carried. However, Mayor Pro-Tem Messick said a motion was on the floor and seconded. Therefore, they moved forward with the recent motion.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. ~~Discussion of Subpoena Powers for Investigator as per Charter Article VII, Div. 1, Section 2-252.~~

- Council to confirm subpoena authority to the appointed investigator as granted by charter.

  Per Mayor Sartor, this item was stricken from the agenda since there is no investigation, there's no need for appointment.

B. Review and Appointment of Downtown Development Authority Board Members.

City Clerk Jewett shared that this item was listed on the January 5, 2026 Work Session Agenda.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick asked Mayor Sartor if the DDA Chair, Santia Fox could come before Council to present the applicants. Mayor Sartor said the City has additional applications and the deadline is December 31, 2025. The City received three (3) additional applications today and all applications would be discussed at the January 2026 Council Meeting. For the record , Mayor Sartor said the applicants submitted are good applicants and would be presented after the 12/31/25.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick reminded Mayor Sartor that she had made a motion to hear from the DDA Chair, Santia Fox. Mayor Sartor said, "I'm not going to acknowledge her at this time - You don't make a motion to recognize somebody." She further stated, there's additional applicants and it's only fair that all applicants are considered with the same weight and judgment. So, for her to come and present three applicants publicly and the other ones not have the opportunity is just not fair. The deadline is December 31, 2025. When the deadline is closed, we will go through a review and vetting process.

C. Funding for Interim Part-Time Executive Director.

- Discussion and approval of funds for an interim part-time Executive Director for the Downtown Development Authority as presented by Chairwoman Santia Fox.

  Chairwoman Fox requested $9,000.00 to be allocated for a DDA Consultant. The contract was sent to the board members. She requested 50% to help fund it for six (6) months while Council get an Executive Director to help facilitate the process. She noted they have day-to-day business for the DDA that needs to be addressed, and they are in the process

of restructuring. The person would come in specifically to help carry out those mandates not to necessarily serve as an Executive Director, but more so as a DDA Consultant.

Mayor Sartor noted the language on the Agenda the read differently (see above). It reads "interim part-time Executive Director." She asked DDA Chair Fox for clarification. Chairwoman Fox replied, we don't have anyone right now. We have been doing everything on our own. I'm asking for support for us to be able to hire a consultant. Mayor Sartor asked if the consultant would serve as an Interim Executive Director or have any responsibilities as it relates to an Interim Executive Director? Chairwoman Fox replied, it may pass because if he's going to be preparing agendas or speaking with the Vice Chair or helping with training then some of those functions are Executive Director. She further stated that they are taking the recommendations that the attorney gave because processes and procedures were violated. The attorney made some recommendations according to the new Bylaws. We have board members that need to be trained within two months of their appointments. He would help facilitate those processes. Mayor Sartor said as long as we are clear that he has no Executive Director responsibilities. Chairwoman Fox said the Chair and the new Vice Chair would be able to help facilitate that process.

Mayor Sartor reviewed his scope in Exhibit A and said some of those were Executive Director positions. Those items would be excluded from his duties and responsibility. Chairwoman Fox said they don't have an executed contract yet, therefore, the scope can be reviewed and discussed in the appropriate authority in the DDA meeting tomorrow. Mayor Sartor further clarified that if any of those within that scope relates to Executive Director duties, he would not be able to fulfill it.

Mayor Sartor asked where the funds would come from and when the first payment would need to be made. Chairwoman Fox said probably by tomorrow when they go into engagement with him. Mayor Sartor asked if DDA can make the payment and the City help out on the back end. Chairwoman Fox said as long as they can get something in writing that the DDA would be reimbursed, that's absolutely fine.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick asked for clarification regarding the 50%. It would be 50% of $18,000.00. Councilwoman Fox said the monthly fee is $3,000,00 and the board negotiated not to go over $3,000.00. Therefore, it would be $9,000.00 for DDA to pay and $9,000.00 for the City to pay.

Mayor Sartor asked for the name of the person. Chairwoman Fox said his name was Xavier Ross. Mayor Sartor said she did not have a problem with giving the money but wanted them to review the contract prior to voting. Chairwoman Fox said she is only asking for approval of the funds at this time and not the contract whether it be Xavier Ross or someone else. However, she would have liked the person to start December 29, 2025. Mayor Sartor said she preferred to know who they would be funding and preferred to present the contract at the beginning of the fiscal year – January 5, 2026 Work Session.

Mayor Pro-Tem Messick clarified that the DDA is just needing someone to give them advice up until the City can move forward with an Economic Development Director. The DDA needs funding for an advisor until the newly seated council is sworn in on January 5, 2026. Mayor Sartor said to let the DDA fund/invest in the first $9,000.00, and when it exceeds the $9,000.00, the City can step in and pay at that time. She told Chairwoman to select who they want as a consultant during their DDA meeting tomorrow, pay them, and then once DDA gets to a point where they can no longer afford the consultant, then come back to Mayor and Council for the additional funds.

Councilmember Miller recommended an Intergovernmental Agreement.

Mayor Sartor thanked Councilwoman Fox for her time regarding the matter.

No action taken on this matter.

VII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Larry Jones – (Jonesboro Resident) – Expressed concerns about taxpayers' money being used for frivolous investigations. He urged the City to focus on matters that directly benefit the residents of Jonesboro and to avoid wasting public funds. He suggested that issues of this nature should be brought before the Ethics Board, where they can be addressed at no cost. He emphasized the importance of acting in good faith and prioritizing the community.
- Tierra Turner (Vice Chair of DDA) – Addressed the ongoing structure of the Downtown Development Authority, emphasizing the need to move forward with clarity and purpose. She expressed urgency and a plea for assistance in resolving issues.

VIII. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Executive Session for the purpose of discussing litigation, real estate, or personnel matters.

None

B. Presentation and Consider any action(s), if necessary, based on decision(s) made in Executive Session.

None

IX. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 11:28 p.m.

RESULT: **Approved (Vote was unanimous)**
MOVER: **Councilmember Powell**
SECONDER: **Councilmember D. Dixon**

Donya L. Sartor, Mayor

Shandrella Jewett, City Clerk

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Donya L. Sartor
FROM: Joslyn C. Jackson, Esq.
DATE: December 12, 2025
RE: **Effect of DDA Interim Investigative Report and Hall Booth Smith Investigation on October 22, 2025 Ordinance**

ISSUE PRESENTED

Whether the October 22, 2025 Ordinance appointing an independent investigator to conduct an administrative investigation into certain financial transactions remains necessary or operative in light of (1) the Downtown Development Authority's completed Interim Investigative Report and (2) Hall Booth Smith's acknowledgment that its engagement exceeded the scope of the Ordinance and its subsequent halt of the investigation.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

While the October 22 Ordinance is not facially invalid, it is now moot as applied and unnecessary to accomplish its stated purpose. The factual inquiry the Ordinance was intended to authorize has already been completed by the proper governing entity, and the City's retained investigator has halted further action after acknowledging the limits of the Ordinance and in light of the Mayor's notice of an intended Temporary Restraining Order. Continued expenditure of public funds to pursue an overlapping or duplicative investigation would not serve a legitimate governmental purpose and would expose the City to unnecessary legal and fiscal risk.

BACKGROUND

On October 22, 2025, the Mayor and Council adopted an Ordinance appointing an independent investigator pursuant to Article VII of the City Code. The Ordinance authorizes an administrative investigation into all financial transactions occurring from, to, and between the City of Jonesboro and the Jonesboro Downtown Development Authority for fiscal year 2025, beginning January 1, 2025 and ending October 20, 2025.

On December 3, 2025, the Jonesboro Downtown Development Authority released an Interim Investigative Report addressing the propriety of certain 2025 financial transactions, including those

related to the Juneteenth Celebration. The report includes a review of expenditures, approvals, sponsorships, reimbursements, applicable bylaws, and interviews of relevant individuals.

Separately, Hall Booth Smith, P.C., the firm selected as independent investigator under the Ordinance, acknowledged in writing that the scope of its engagement letter exceeded the authority granted by the Ordinance and halted its investigation pending further action by the Council.

ANALYSIS

1. Scope and Purpose of the October 22 Ordinance

The Ordinance authorizes a limited administrative investigation for a defined purpose: to gather facts regarding City–DDA financial transactions during a specific 2025 time-period. It does not authorize an open-ended inquiry into City operations, general finances, or conduct outside City–DDA transactional activity.

The Ordinance is investigative in nature, not adjudicative. Its sole function is to obtain information.

2. The DDA Interim Investigative Report Satisfies the Ordinance's Purpose

The DDA Interim Investigative Report examined the same category of transactions and the same general time period addressed by the Ordinance. The report analyzed whether expenditures were authorized, whether DDA bylaws were followed, how sponsorship funds were handled, and whether payments were properly approved or reimbursed.

Importantly, the DDA is the governmental entity with statutory authority over its own finances and expenditures. As such, its investigation is not ancillary to the City's inquiry; it is primary. The factual record the Ordinance sought to create now already exists.

3. Duplication of Investigative Efforts Is Not a Legitimate Public Purpose

Georgia law disfavors the use of public funds for duplicative governmental actions when the underlying objective has already been achieved. Once the relevant facts are known and documented, continuing an investigation serves no legitimate administrative function.

Here, a second investigation would not uncover new categories of transactions or expand the City's authority. It would simply re-examine matters already reviewed by the entity with direct jurisdiction over the expenditures.

4. Effect of Hall Booth Smith's Halted Investigation

Hall Booth Smith's acknowledgment that its engagement exceeded the Ordinance's scope and its decision to halt further investigative activity is significant. There is currently no active investigation underway pursuant to the Ordinance. The firm has made clear that it cannot proceed without either narrowing its work or the Council amending the Ordinance.

Given that the Ordinance's investigative purpose has already been fulfilled by the DDA report, there is no legal or practical justification for restarting or expanding the investigation.

5. Mootness as Applied

Although the Ordinance remains valid on its face, it is now moot as applied. Subsequent events, the completion of a comprehensive DDA investigation and the cessation of the City's investigator, have eliminated any remaining controversy or investigative necessity.

Proceeding further would not advance transparency or accountability and would unnecessarily expend public funds.

CONCLUSION

The October 22, 2025 Ordinance was enacted to authorize a fact-finding investigation. Those facts have now been gathered, documented, and reported by the Downtown Development Authority, the entity with primary authority over the transactions in question. The City's retained investigator has halted further action after acknowledging the Ordinance's limits.

Accordingly, while the Ordinance remains on the books, it no longer serves an operative purpose. Any further investigation would be duplicative, fiscally imprudent, and legally unnecessary. The Mayor may reasonably conclude that the Ordinance's objectives have been satisfied and that no further action is warranted.

Joslyn C. Jackson