CITY OF STATESBORO
WORK SESSION MINUTES
JUNE 16, 2026

Mayor & Council Work Session | 50 East Main Street | 4:00 PM

A Work Session of the Statesboro City Council was held on June 16, 2026 at 4:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 50 East Main Street. Present was Mayor Jonathan McCollar; Council Members: Tangie Johnson, John Riggs, and Shari Barr. Also present was City Clerk Leah Harden, City Attorney Cain Smith, City Manager Charles Penny, Assistant City Manager Jason Boyles and Public Affairs Manager Layne Phillips. Absent was Councilmember Ginny Hendley.

1. Sewer Lateral Program

Director of Public Utilities, Matt Aycock, reviewed the city's existing sewer lateral ordinance and assistance program. Under the current ordinance, responsibility for the sewer lateral from the house to the sewer main rests entirely with the property owner. The existing assistance program, established several years ago, reimburses eligible residents for a portion of repair costs. The calculation is based on the extent of cuts made to improved surfaces such as roads, curbing, and sidewalks. Currently, eligibility is limited to owner-occupied single-family residences, which has significantly restricted the program's reach given that approximately 70% of residential properties in Statesboro are rental properties. Since 2023, only six or seven homeowners have received assistance under the program.

Matt Aycock noted several compounding issues: repair costs have risen sharply since the pre-COVID era, with quotes now commonly ranging from $7,000 to $19,000 or more; many eligible residents would still need to pay the full cost upfront and await reimbursement; and much of the aging infrastructure — including Orangeburg pipe installed as far back as the 1940s — is at or beyond the end of its service life. It was also noted that plumbers qualified to perform sewer work often lack the expertise for road excavation, leading to substandard pavement patches that accelerate street deterioration.

Research found that most Georgia municipalities do not have an established assistance program to help property owners manage these costs. Staff is proposing two key changes to the ordinance. First, the eligibility criterion would be broadened from "owner-occupied" to "owner of any single-family residence," thereby extending program access to landlords of single-family rental properties while continuing to exclude duplexes, apartment complexes, and other multi-unit or commercial properties.

City Manager, Charles Penny, cited the case of a constituent — Ms. Bragg — whose single-family home rental was ineligible under the current program despite having a legitimate need.

Second, rather than reimbursing a calculated amount after the fact, the city would assume direct responsibility for excavating and exposing the lateral at the right-of-way or under the roadway — the most costly portion of any repair. City crews would perform the work where conditions are safe, or coordinate with a qualified utility contractor where they are not. The property owner's plumber would then complete the pipe repair. It was noted that having city-managed contractors perform roadway cuts would ensure patches are restored to city standards.

The volume of claims would likely increase under the expanded eligibility, but staff does not anticipate an unmanageable surge. City Manager, Charles Penny, indicated that staff capacity exists to absorb the additional work, with the option to engage contractors if demand exceeds available resources.

2. Land Bank Authority

Justin Williams, Director of Planning, provided a briefing on the history, governance, and current operational status of the Statesboro – Bulloch Land Bank Authority. The Land Bank Authority was established in 2002 through an intergovernmental agreement between the City of Statesboro and Bulloch County. Its most significant early activity was facilitating the development of Statesboro Point, largely by transferring property to Habitat for Humanity. The State of Georgia expanded the powers available to land bank authorities in 2012, but the local authority did not fully adopt those expanded powers until 2026, when both the city and county signed an updated intergovernmental agreement and the board revised its bylaws accordingly.

The authority's core powers include the acquisition, management, maintenance, disposition, and foreclosure of properties. Critically, the land bank can extinguish liens held by the city or county on acquired properties — a significant tool for returning long-dormant parcels to productive use. Properties burdened by heirs' title issues, where multiple owners may be unresponsive or unwilling to act, are a primary target. Staff noted that while code enforcement has been active in demolishing dilapidated structures, the resulting vacant lots often remain encumbered by liens indefinitely, preventing redevelopment. The land bank provides a mechanism to break that cycle.

The board currently consists of five members: two appointed by the city, two appointed by the county, and one at-large member appointed by the four appointees. The board meets at least four times per year and is currently working toward its first property acquisitions within the city limits.

Justin Williams explained that the authority is requesting $70,000 in city funding — drawn from ARPA interest earnings — to cover property acquisition costs, legal and administrative fees, and property maintenance expenses. Because no county properties are currently under consideration for acquisition, the request is being directed solely to the city at this time. The authority adopted a formal resolution requesting these funds. The City Manager Charles Penny emphasized that access to capital has been the primary barrier to the land bank becoming more active, and that while ARPA interest funds will eventually be exhausted, this allocation represents an important step toward building the authority's operational capacity. A resolution is on this evening’s agenda, requesting the funding.

3. **Creek on the Blue Mile**

Brad Deal, Director of Engineering and Public Works provided an update to the Creek on the Blue Mile project. In 2019 City acquired a loan through the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) in the amount of approximately $15.5 million, intended to fund construction of creek drainage and water quality improvements. The draw-down deadline was in 2026, and a prior extension had been granted. The City sought a second extension but GEFA declined to support one. However, GEFA advised the City in writing that it may reapply for the same loan amount, at the same interest rate and terms, prior to 2030.

Then in 2023, the City was approved for a state ARPA-funded Improving Neighborhood Outcomes in Disproportionately Impacted Communities (INODIC) grant of $1.65 million, originally intended to fund the construction of amenities along the creek corridor such as brick pavers, lighting, benches, and pedestrian bridges. The expenditure deadline for these funds is October 2026. Because construction could not be completed in that timeframe and purchasing materials for storage was not permitted under the grant terms, the City successfully negotiated a scope change with the state Office of Planning and Budget to redirect those funds toward the design of Memorial Park, which sits along the creek corridor.

An associated task order with EMC Engineering, in the amount of $915,420, is included on the evening's regular agenda. The scope of work covers the design of Memorial Park improvements including new water features, sidewalks, pickleball courts, and landscaping. The promenade trail design and a potential parking structure were not included in EMC's scope, as those elements could not be completed before the October grant deadline; space for those elements are being reserved in the overall park concept. Charles Penny, City Manager noted that Memorial Park design had not previously had dedicated funding, making this grant redirection a meaningful opportunity. Mayor, Jonathan McCollar inquired about the construction cost of the park relative to the overall project, and staff indicated that a construction cost estimate would be produced as part of EMC's design work, with a rough range previously discussed in the vicinity of $5–$8 million for the park component.

EMC Engineering has been under contract for creek design since November, with the current task order valued at approximately $1.4 million, with at least one additional task order anticipated to finalize plans. Work completed to date includes updated surveys, environmental coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and geotechnical soil testing. Preliminary design plans are in progress, and EMC participates in monthly coordination meetings with City staff, the creek partners group, and bridge consultant Michael Baker. The conceptual design calls for a 20-foot-wide channel with a rock bottom and concrete walls, flanked by 10-foot-wide pedestrian walkways on each side with lighting, benches, and related amenities. An overflow drainage component is included to manage flooding events.

Michael Baker International is managing bridge design at three locations: South Main Street, Fair Road, and South Zettower Avenue. South Zettower Avenue crossing will be a box culvert (classified as a bridge by GDOT due to its size), while the Fair Road location is anticipated to be a more conventional bridge structure. The South Main Street bridge design remains under evaluation, with property owner impacts needing to be resolved. GDOT is funding the design and construction of all three bridge crossings. Michael Baker is in a similar preliminary phase to EMC, having completed initial surveying and environmental work and currently preparing preliminary plans with monthly coordination meetings ongoing.

Mr. Deal outlined the full funding landscape for the project. GDOT is funding all bridge design and construction. A Transportation Alternatives Program grant of $2.12 million has been approved for trail construction, with an additional application for design funding still pending a decision. The GEFA State Direct Investment Grant of $5.5 million (with approximately $2.6 million remaining) is expected to fund creek design. The GEFA loan will be reapplied for prior to 2030 for construction. The INODIC grant is now being applied to Memorial Park design.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:56 pm

Jonathan McCollar, Mayor

Leah Harden, City Clerk