CITY OF STATESBORO
WORK SESSION MINUTES
OCTOBER 20, 2026

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

A Work Session of the Statesboro City Council was held on October 20, 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, and Public Affairs Manager Layne Phillips. Absent was Councilmember Ginny Hendley.

1. School Board Presentation

Bulloch County School Superintendent, Dr. Torian White, gave a presentation about what all has been going on since he was appointed, along with an overview of the annual report. He shared that since taking office, he has conducted one-on-one meetings with board members and principals across the county to assess district priorities, highlight institutional strengths, and target key areas for growth.

Dr. White shared that several schools in the county have received achievement awards: Statesboro High School earned recognition as both an Advanced Placement STEM and STEM Achievement School. Brooklet and Nevils Elementary were named Title I Distinguished Schools, while Mattie Lively and Julia P. Bryant Elementary earned Title I Reward School honors. Literacy Leader distinctions went to Nevils Elementary, Portal Elementary, and Southeast Bulloch Middle School, with Math Leader designations awarded to Mattie Lively Elementary alongside Portal, Southeast Bulloch, and William James Middle Schools. Additionally, the district's School Nutrition Services department received the Georgia Farm to School Award.

Addressing academic performance, the 2025 Georgia College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) placed Bulloch County's overall score at 73.5, compared to the state average of 78.6. New assessment scores for English Language Arts reading are expected to be released in approximately 60 days.

Dr. White underscored the district's central mission: equipping every graduate to be successfully employed, enlisted, or enrolled. The district's career readiness initiatives empower students to chart their own paths toward their personal ambitions. A significant competitive advantage over neighboring districts is Bulloch County's dual-enrollment participation through Georgia Southern University and Ogeechee Technical College, with 36% of 11th graders and 42% of 12th graders enrolled in college coursework. Furthermore, hands-on career experience remains strong, with 9% of juniors and 26% of seniors actively engaged in work-based learning programs. Moving forward under the "One Bulloch" vision, the district aims to build on these milestones and sustain positive momentum.

2. Occupancy Tax

Justin Samples, with Visit Statesboro, addressed the Mayor and City Council to propose raising the City's lodging excise tax rate from 6% to 8%, aligning Statesboro with Georgia's prevailing municipal standard. Mr. Samples emphasized that this tax is paid entirely by visitors rather than local residents, with all incremental revenue dedicated to tourism reinvestment. Currently, 85% of Georgia communities levying a hotel-motel tax under this code section charge the full 8%, leaving Statesboro as one of only 25 communities statewide still at the 6% rate. Based on Fiscal Year 2025 figures, the proposed 2% adjustment is projected to generate an additional $531,117 in annual revenue.

Mr. Samples clarified the allocation formula under state statute, noting that the first 3% represents the unrestricted base, while all funds collected above 3% are legally restricted to tourism-related expenditures. Under the current structure, proceeds are distributed among Visit Statesboro (41.67%), a discretionary pool supporting entities such as the Downtown Statesboro Development Authority (DSDA) and the Averitt Center for the Arts (50%), and the Tourism Product Development (TPD) Fund (8.33%). The additional two cents collected from the increase would bypass the discretionary pool entirely, as state law requires one cent to fund tourism promotion and the second to support capital development. Consequently, baseline funding for the discretionary recipients would remain fully protected at current dollar levels, while Visit Statesboro would see a 40% increase in promotional funding and the TPD Fund a 200% increase.

Regarding compliance, Mr. Samples noted that development funds must be expended within the fiscal year collected rather than held in reserve. If TPD funds remain unallocated to an approved project by year-end, statutory rules require them to temporarily transfer to Visit Statesboro for promotional use until a designated project is identified. If approved during the current legislative cycle, implementation and revenue collection would take effect on July 1 at the beginning of the next fiscal year.

City Manager Charles Penny stated that in late November there is a plan to have a conversation with our local delegations to get this on their agenda and get it introduced into the legislature in January.

3. Budget Reduction

City Manager Charles Penny presented his recommendations for the FY2027 budget reductions. He emphasized that the City is not broke, but noted that the General Fund must maintain Council's policy of a 25% fund balance ($8 million).

Due to the full cost of Bulloch County's decision to dissolve the Fire District, the General Fund transfer to the Fire Fund increased from $3,200,000 to $7,485,550. Last year's revenue loss was covered by temporary, unsustainable loans from enterprise funds that must be repaid. Despite these challenges, the budget remains balanced, includes pay adjustments, and adds no new employees, further reductions were deemed necessary to offset a $1.34 million variance, representing the 0.975-mill difference between the 8.625-mill and 9.6-mill tax rates.

To address the shortfall, Mr. Penny recommended freezing multiple municipal positions for FY2027 and implementing cuts across community programs, contracts, and events. Proposed operational suspensions included the Downtown Live Concert Series, Youth Connect, the annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony, special events requiring multi-departmental overtime, the Village Builders initiative, annual reports, and the leadership and City Council retreats. In addition, reductions were proposed for Streets and Parks contracted maintenance services for the cemetery and designated city roadways. Also included are the following department reductions: Municipal Court ($1,550); City Clerk ($11,997); Village Builders ($13,996); Public Affairs ($15,400); Finance ($16,145); Customer Service ($17,510); City Manager ($27,591); Human Resources ($58,552); Fire ($77,500); Planning, Code, and Protective Inspections ($103,420); Governing Body ($179,455); Police ($200,800); Public Works and Engineering ($340,138); and the elimination of the annual employee holiday bonus ($180,000).

The General Fund has grown from $16,000,000 in 2019 to $32,000,000 in 2026. The city is less dependent on Fund Balance to balance the budget and used $205,210 to balance FY2027. The increase in the General Fund also increases the required amount of Fund Balance in order to comply with Council’s policy. Current Fund Balance is estimated at $6.5 million, by council’s policy, the fund balance should be $8 million.

The recommendation for FY 2028, starting July 1, 2027, suspend pay plan adjustment and pay for performance, the rollback next year as a result of FLOST should be 2.5 mills; however, if the millage rate is rolled back, you will again result in a revenue shortfall. The council will again need to increase the millage rate in order to have enough revenue to cover the budget, which in effect results in a tax increase.

Discussion by the Mayor and Council from the included restoring funding for the following: Youth Connect ($52,000), Village Builders ($13,996), Four Downtown Live Concerts ($50,000), and the Holiday Bonus ($180,000) totaling $295,996. A budget amendment reflecting these directives and incorporating all other budget reductions will be on the November 3, 2026 Council agenda.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:27 pm

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Jonathan McCollar, Mayor

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Leah Harden, City Clerk