



Where Community Connects

## CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL CALLED MEETING SUMMARY MINUTES

THURSDAY, APRIL 25, 2024 6:00 P.M.

---

### Mayor & City Council

Mayor Anthony S. Ford At-Large  
Mayor Pro Tem Kyle Berry – Council District 3  
Councilmember Elton Alexander – Council District 5  
Councilmember Yolanda Barber – Council District 4  
Councilmember LaKeisha Gantt – Council District 1  
Councilmember Alphonso Thomas – Council District 2

### Administration

Frederick Gardiner – City Manager  
Vanessa Holiday – City Clerk  
Cassandra Lester – Deputy City Clerk  
Lakeisha Gaines – Interim City Treasurer  
Quinton Washington – City Attorney  
Samantha Embry – City Attorney

Mission: To provide visionary leadership and superior municipal services that enhance the quality of life for citizens while creating a welcoming business atmosphere focused on sustainability and expansion of tourism and cultural events.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ford at 6:01 p.m.

Invocation by Mayor Ford

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all in attendance.

City Clerk, Vanessa Holiday was asked to proceed with a verbal roll call. All members were present except Mayor Pro Tem Berry.

Motion to adopt the Agenda was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Councilmember Gantt. The motion passed unanimously 4-0.

### NEW BUSINESS

1. Council Consideration to approve an Ordinance to allow patrons to bring alcohol to the Amphitheater during the concerts.  
Presented by Frederick Gardiner - City Manager, Quinton Washington, City Attorney and Harold Young, Amphitheater General Manager

Mr. Gardiner referenced the vote of the Council during the February 2024 Retreat to prohibit alcohol and food sales during the Amphitheater concerts and that when the action from the Ordinance was recently announced to the public, Mr. Young,

the Amphitheater Manager, received push back and negative feedback from the public, promoters, and members of Council.

Councilmember Barber noted the decision was made by the City Council in February at the Retreat and prior to the advertising of the first five shows, and that pushback should have been expected when making this announcement just a few weeks prior to the first concert; and questioned why directives from the Council are not carried out and followed through by staff.

Mr. Gardiner noted that the intention was to go live with the announcement after the vote in February, however, as Mr. Young began to receive pushback from the industry and discussions with members of Council, the idea was to see if there was a way to retract the action.

Councilmember Barber stated that she has not been included in any conversations regarding the pushback prohibiting alcohol or food at the Amphitheater and asked that the full Council be included in all conversations.

Mayor Ford noted his recollection was that he had spoken to members of the Council regarding food and alcohol and the negative comments and pushback.

Councilmember Barber stated that her conversation with Mayor Ford related to tickets, not food and alcohol.

Mayor Ford noted a Legal Opinion was still pending regarding tickets.

Councilmember Thomas stated the Agenda item being discussed relates to the Alcohol Ordinance, and noted the intent of the Amphitheater was to enhance the quality of life for the community, and that while the Amphitheater is still in its infancy stage and experiencing growing pains, he is sure that the city will get it right and the Council will make decisions to make the Amphitheater enjoyable and sustainable.

Councilmember Gantt agreed, noting she wants to make sure the city gets it right, and referenced other venues the city has to compete with and those venues are allowing food and alcohol, and that the decisions cannot be personal, noting this is a business decision where she would obviously prefer to see the Amphitheater full; and noted her vote at the Retreat in February was not in support of prohibiting alcohol at the Amphitheater.

Mayor Ford referenced the vote at the February Retreat to prohibit alcohol Passed 4-0-1 (Gantt Abstained); and the vote to prohibit food Passed Unanimously 5-0.

Councilmember Alexander stated the Alcohol policy has nothing to do with the ticket sales, noting the policy to prohibit alcohol was not announced until last week, however, the ticket sales are low, and there had been no mention of the increase in ticket prices, which would have affected his vote at the February Retreat.

Councilmember Thomas called for a Point of Order to limit the discussion to the Agenda Item relating to the Alcohol Ordinance.

Councilmember Alexander agreed, noting a Special Called Meeting such as this should have happened prior to the notice going out.

Mr. Young noted that he advised the Council during the February Retreat that vendors had complained about alcohol sales and that it is important for the City owns its product(s), and noted artists have stated they prefer the Stockbridge Amphitheater due to the Chick-Fil-A experience, and that the 2024 season will have a new alcohol vendor with no drink priced over \$14 and will have servers walking through the stands selling drinks.

Mayor Pro Tem Berry joined the meeting at 6:38 p.m.

Councilmember Gantt suggested the City revert to the previous policy to allow alcohol and food, and referenced other venues, noting the experience is not at the level that is experienced at the Stockbridge Amphitheater.

Councilmember Alexander noted 2021 food and alcohol was allowed; 2022 no food, alcohol or water was allowed, and in 2023 food, alcohol and water was allowed, noting there needs to be consistency.

Mr. Tony Starling, the Amphitheater Operations Manager, noted he has an extensive history of producing concerts, and there are a number of expenses incurred for each concert, and noted 325 commercial advertisements are running every week for the Stockbridge Amphitheater concerts.

Councilmember Barber inquired about municipalities managing the operations of their Amphitheater venues, and asked if Mable House was operated by the City of Mableton, the response was no; asked if Chastain was operated by the City of Atlanta, the response was no; asked if Wolf Creek was operated by the City of South Fulton, the response was yes and the venue is currently closed; and asked if the Macon Amphitheater was operated by the City of Macon/Bibb County, the response was no; and stated that she cannot support any action that will have a negative financial impact on the city.

Mr. Young stated that allowing alcohol will have a negative financial impact, noting the City receives 30% of alcohol sales, and reiterated the importance of the city seeking its own licenses for the 2025 year.

Motion to approve an Ordinance to allow patrons to bring alcohol to the Amphitheater concerts was made by Councilmember Gantt; seconded by Councilmember Thomas:

During the discussion, Mayor Pro Tem Berry requested the number of shows and gross alcohol sales for 2021, 2022 and 2023; and later asked that 2021 not be excluded noting there were only being two shows.

Councilmember Barber stated she has made multiple requests for the Amphitheater financial reports for 2022 and 2023.

During the discussion, Mayor Ford suspended the vote until Mr. Young could provide the requested financial data for alcohol, ticket, and concession sales for the 2022 and 2023 concerts.

Councilmember Gantt questioned why the City's Interim Treasurer, Lakeisha Gaines was not in attendance to respond to the financial inquiries for the city.

Mr. Young noted that concert reports have been submitted to the city for the two concerts in 2021, the 21 concerts in 2022 and the 23 concerts in 2023, and noted the city received more revenue when alcohol was prohibited.

Mayor Pro Tem Berry noted the overall goal is to manage the Amphitheater efficiently, and noted that it is not necessarily about math, but rather the analysis shows a correlation to the emotional satisfaction and a feel good anecdotal that you cannot quantify.

Mr. Young presented data for 2022 and 2023 concerts, and Mayor Ford called for the vote to approve an Ordinance to allow alcohol at the Amphitheater during the concerts. The motion Failed 2-0-3 (Gantt/Thomas In Favor); (Alexander/Barber/Berry/ Abstained); Councilwoman Barber cited the Abstention due to the lack of supporting financial documents and data.

Motion to revisit the consideration to approve an Ordinance to allow patrons to bring alcohol to the Amphitheater during the concerts with the required data of alcohol, concession, and ticket sales with documentation to include all manual and computer-generated reports to be presented at the April 30, 2024 Work Session meeting was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Berry. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

2. Council Consideration to approve a Resolution to allow patrons to bring food and beverages to the Amphitheater during the concerts.

Presented by Frederick Gardiner - City Manager, Quinton Washington, City Attorney and Harold Young, Amphitheater General Manager

Councilmember Alexander noted that he was okay with the food and service provider, however, there are concerns with the customer service experience due to complaints of long lines.

Councilmember Thomas agreed that the wait time needs improvement.

Mr. Young noted that the Amphitheater was constructed with only two concession areas, and that has presented a challenge, however, G. Garvin has a variety of quick items on the menu and is accustomed to server thousands of patrons at State Farm Arena; and noted there will be (4) four lines of service with a third portable station for concessions and is certain the wait times will be better, and provided a list of food choices scheduled to be served.

Councilmember Gantt noted the venue was constructed to include space for food trucks.

Mr. Gardiner noted the issues with food trucks in the Amphitheater include carbon monoxide emissions and grease and oil staining the concrete.

Mayor Ford asked Mr. Young to send the G. Garvin menu to the City Manager and City Clerk. Mr. Young confirmed.

Councilmember Thomas agreed Council needs to see the data and information for the prior years 2022 and 2023 and offered the opinion to allow alcohol to be brought in for concerts.

Councilmember Gantt agreed the financials for the prior years should be submitted to the Council and offered her support that alcohol should be allowed at the Amphitheater concerts.

Councilmember Barber noted that the Stockbridge Amphitheater cannot be compared to other venues where the operations and funding are not run by a municipality, and that it is the Council's responsibility to use taxpayer dollars appropriately, and the reporting will show the financial impact to the city, noting revenue both in and out should have been captured in the city's financial reporting for 2023 and likewise, the GRA reporting should be accounted for in the city's finances for revenue in and out for 2022.

Motion to approve a Resolution to allow patrons to bring food and non-alcoholic beverages to the Amphitheater during the concerts in a 12x12 cooler per patron and task staff with finding more food service options to be made available to concert patrons to be presented at the May 27, 2024 Work Session Meeting was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Councilmember Gantt. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

### 3. Council Discussion of Amphitheater Operations for the 2024 Concert Season.

Mr. Gardiner noted it is ill advised for councilmembers to engage in the day to day operations of the Amphitheater, but rather look for private partnerships; noted the way the Amphitheater is being run today is not sustainable and the City Council needs to look at an alternative, noting the three City Events – Juneteenth, July 4<sup>th</sup> and BridgeFest would continue to be free to the public; and allow a contractor/promoter to rent the facility, and bring in the artists, and foot the bill. Councilmember Alexander asked if there would be a city budget required.

Mr. Gardiner's responded, no.

Councilmember Barber noted the City needs to seek more sponsorships and a sponsor for naming rights; and asked that she be allowed to speak without interruption; Councilmember Barber stated that she has been constantly asking for financial information for the Amphitheater and supports an outside entity to complete Phase II of the Amphitheater concerts, but only through the competitive bidding process.

Mayor Ford referenced the city's Amphitheater Rental Policy and the city seeing Mr. Young's contract through.

Mr. Gardiner noted the Amphitheater Rental Policy would go away if a third-party entity were brought in to complete the second half of the concert season and recommended the city pivot.

Mr. Young cautioned the Council, noting that bringing in a third-party promoter would require the entity to be thoroughly and properly vetted.

Councilmember Barber noted those conversations regarding the operations of the Amphitheater should be had with the City Manager, who is over the operations, and Legal who will advise accordingly.

Councilmember Alexander noted his support of a third-party entity forward for Phase II of the concert series, have the entity vetted, have the entity front the funding to secure the artists and expenses, and takes the city off the hook financially.

Councilmember Thomas noted the Council moved too quickly, and too fast before and made mistakes, and needs to see a laid-out plan and documentation before proceeding with a third party for Phase II and does not support a change in the structure at this time without have the information provided to the full Council.

Mr. Young provided the Council with a Price Level report; and referenced big sponsorship opportunities that were lost; and referenced the different ticking pricing structures based on the artist, as recommended by Councilman Alexander. Councilmember Gantt wanted to clarify that the goal is to accomplish a process for Amphitheater operations.

Mr. Gardiner noted he has met with a long-standing Stockbridge family who is interested in naming rights for the Amphitheater.

Mr. Young presented the 2024 Concert Lineup, noting the concerts that are confirmed and those that are still pending.

Councilmember Thomas referenced the Amphitheater Rental Policy that has yet to be completed. Mr. Young noted there is currently no rental policy in place.

Ms. Madonna Baker, Amphitheater Staff, cautioned on micromanaging, and noted better communication is needed among the Council, noting perception can negatively influence sponsorship.

Mr. Young referenced a block of tickets purchased by McDonalds, a PBS special highlighting the Amphitheater, and potential sponsorship from Aflac.

Mr. Baker noted there are several advertisements on the radio, tv spots, and billboards.

Councilmember Barber noted the members of Council should not be micromanaging the Amphitheater, noting the Amphitheater General Manager should be working with the City Manager who will keep the full Council updated

and informed.

Councilmember Gantt asked how the City can help market the Amphitheater.

Mr. Young responded that all members of the Governing Body are Ambassadors who should always look to promote the Amphitheater, and offered an example of the Mayor of Macon, who personally solicited sponsors for the Macon Amphitheater.

Mr. Young stated that he is proud to represent the Stockbridge Amphitheater and provide the patrons with a picnic experience; noting Ticketmaster fees are huge at 18% of the base price, booked based on availability.

Councilmember Alexander asked Mr. Young if he was affiliated with any other Amphitheater. The response from Mr. Young was no, and advised he would follow up with the Interim Treasurer and submit the requested financial information to the Council.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

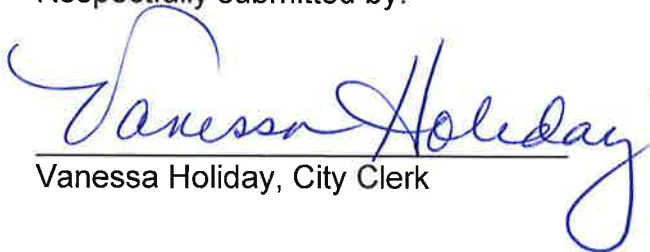
Motion to convene Executive Session for Personnel, Real Estate and Litigation was made by Mayor Pro Tem Berry; seconded by Councilmember Gantt. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Motion to adjourn Executive Session and sign an Affidavit with No Action was made by Councilmember Thomas; seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Berry. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Motion to reconvene the meeting was made by Councilmember Alexander; seconded by Councilmember Thomas. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mayor Pro Tem Berry; seconded by Councilmember Alexander. The motion passed unanimously 5-0 at 10:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:



Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk



Anthony S. Ford, Mayor