

Hahira City Council
February 6, 2026
Council Retreat
8:30 AM – Hahira Depot

Present at the Council Retreat were Mayor Terry Davis, Mayor Pro Tem Klay Luke, Councilwoman Louise White, Councilwoman Cindy Becton, Councilman David Lindsey, City Manager Jonathan Sumner, Interim City Clerk Victoria Ingram, Chief Stryde Jones, Chief David Thompson, Public Works Director Willie Jones, Finance Director Carol Royal, and Main Street Director Jennifer Price.

The Retreat began with City Manager Sumner presenting the City of Hahira Mission and Vision Statement; Core Values; and Community Value Statements. He listed threats to the City which included Valdosta/Lowndes County encroachment. Positives were that Moody Air Force Base was no longer threatened to close with the additional training mission.

City Manager Sumner presented the financial presentation of the City, including the 2026 Budget. He stated that with the addition of Teresa Smith as the Assistance Finance Director, she will bring a wealth of knowledge. The General Fund budget growth was discussed, with police and fire being the largest share with administration being second. The LOST budget increased. Liquid cash position over \$1 million. Our rainy days funds currently sit at 22 days, the standard is 90 days. He discussed LOST 2023-2032. Councilman Lindsey asked about Municipal Option Sales Tax, to which City Manager Sumner discussed this further. Director Price asked about the homestead exemption and property taxes and how that would be affected based on the current issues at issue with the State. Further discussion was held, and the addition of a penny sales tax was brought up to replace those funds. City Manager Sumner stated the State would have to take steps to help cities. A brief discussion was held regarding the expansion of MAFB and the issues it will bring to the City.

City Manager Sumner discussed the Proprietary Fund, with W/S Fees being the bulk. Mayor Davis stated that we will need to address inert debris fees, as we are one of the lowest in the region and have remained unchanged for many years. Adding additional dump days as some citizens have requested would stress the budget. Hurricanes hurt us long term as well.

Expenditures were presented. The new WWTP was not included due to it being a SPLOST expenditure. We did well with half a million in tap fees, but that is a temporary bump in the revenue. The 3% increase yearly in the rates is helpful. The sludge blanket removal in the pond will be needed in the very near future again. Director Jones stated the sludge hurts long term with samples and does need to be removed. We will have to replace aging pipes which is state mandated but can be a capital project. No amount has been determined yet. Director Jones stated the money has to be set aside for emergency tower repair/replacement. Director Price asked about the dredging vs WWTP coming online. Director Jones stated the water above the blanket is our treatment volume. Mayor Davis stated the need to add an aerator at the sample site. Discussion was held regarding the need for a healthy proprietary fund. Dredging can't be a SPLOST expenditure. The last dredging did not remove all due to the expense involved. Georgia Rural Water may be able to assist. Councilman Lindsey asked if tap fees can be set aside

for specific expenses. Director Jones stated the dredging must be done every 10 years. The addition of the WWTP may push back that need to allow more time before it is ultimately needed. Mayor Davis asked about the cost for adding the aerator, Director Jones stated approximately \$10,500. A new type of aerator gives a better rate of transfer. The current garbage collection rate of \$12.25 was discussed. Our provider charges \$9.80 and it goes up annually. There is no real profit in garbage, we are now losing money draining W/S rates. Mayor Davis stated we are losing money on inert debris. The W/S rate increase was a hard decision, this will be a hard decision as well.

City Manager Sumner discussed Capital Equipment, Facilities, and Property. SPLOST IX is coming. TSPLOST I is set to expire in 2026 which has a 9-year lifespan. TSPLOST II is coming, with a probable collection of \$525,000. TSPLOST I was set aside for the TAP project of \$391,916, 89% expenditure. Councilwoman White discussed the importance of sidewalks and stated she had looked at the site, and it was mostly commercial property with \$2.7 million from GDOT. Mayor Davis stated the need for sidewalks for children from one school to another. City Manager Sumner stated the cost was too expensive previously, but we can certainly look at the cost again. If we don't spend the \$2.7 million from GDOT, those funds will go away. Funding was further discussed and the effects to property owners. Director Price asked if hotel/motel tax can be used toward infrastructure. City Manager Sumner reiterated that it would be the State potentially condemning property for the sidewalk project, not the City. Councilwoman White wants to go knock on doors and contact owners to discuss, they may not comprehend the details. The project is set for LET in May, so time is of the essence. If we walk away, at least we only lose what we have paid out to date. But this would be the most money the City has ever forfeited. Mayor Pro Tem Luke asked what is Director Jones' personal opinion. Director Jones stated we need more in-depth discussion with GDOT, and find out who from GDOT would be reaching out to property owners. If negotiations fail with the property owners, acquisition is the next step. Further discussion was held. Ultimately, Director Jones and City Manager Sumner will call Monday morning. We believe businesses will want to get in on improvement; it will increase foot traffic to their businesses. Mayor Pro Tem Luke asked if we could explore sidewalks on Hagan Bridge, to which it was stated we would call Tim Ingram.

TSPLOST II has a 10-year lifespan from 2026 – 2036, with a probable collection of \$1,250,000. The Main St Extension and Union Road applicants were approved. West Stanfill realignment will be explored further in the next couple of years, no money we would have to contribute towards that. The State has taken the project. SPLOST VIII closes 3/2026. Discussion was held regarding expenditures. SPLOST IX will have a probable collection of \$9,445,565.

Chief Jones spoke on behalf of the Police Department by starting with the Mission Statement. He spoke about the department's weaknesses, which are the inability to bring on new personnel, but that the losses have been out of our control. The strengths include being community oriented and having a positive rapport with citizens. Short-term goals include better staffing. We are near the bottom for base and incentive pay compared to surrounding and similar sized communities throughout Georgia, others are raising pay. We don't have to compete with VPD due to their call volume, few are willing to go; we do compete with LCSO. We must make it worth wanting to come and stay. We also must compete against the new Amazon facility based on their starting pay. Mayor Pro Tem Luke would like to offer family healthcare; we have

lost a lot of employees due to the lack of this. Training incentives can be monetary. Councilman Lindsey asked what it would take to increase the starting pay to \$50,000. The response was budgeting. City Manager Sumner stated a pay adjustment across the board will be reviewed for all departments. Long term goals were discussed. Mayor Davis asked why we lose officer positions that are still in the budget but not filled. It was stated this was per Mayor Cain's request. Director Price stated she has also lost her assistant position. The police department budget was discussed. Calls for services have increased due to extra patrols. Part 1 and Part 2 crimes were discussed. With more people moving into the city, more problems come with that. Traffic accidents were discussed, including interchange accidents and GDOT's response. Criminal arrests were discussed. The addition of the AAFES has saved us a lot of money. Collections of unpaid citations were discussed; we are working with a new company that will be no cost to us. Community events were discussed and community contacts.

State Certification Manager Debbi Robinson, Ph.D., discussed the process of obtaining state certification, the ongoing process once certification is received, and that we must maintain the standards or lose them. Power DMS software was discussed and why certification is so important.

Chief Thompson spoke on behalf of the Fire Department. He discussed the fire that occurred February 5th and the staffing during the fire. He discussed our partnership with SGMC, as well as the availability of the ambulance which is typically at level 0. Because of this, Hahira Fire Department responds to all medical calls. He stated that when we are on scene on a medical call, they cannot leave until ambulance arrives which ties up our staff often for long periods of time. If another emergency call comes out, we cannot respond to it. He discussed that the City hosted the first EMT-B class for our fire department staff, 95% being licensed. He also discussed the importance of the acquisition of the AED units via grant. City Manager Sumner stated it would be worth considering an increase in salary for those that obtain their EMT-B certification. The cost for the certification was entirely at the expense of the staff attending and was done on their own time. Mayor Davis asked if Chief Thompson could get a list of salaries of other local and similar sized fire departments in the state and if they had certification. Chief Thompson discussed the AFG grant of \$70,740. Chief Thompson writes all our FD grants. We have obtained an ISO rating of 3 providing savings to the city and community. He provided an overview of the fire department and how it operates, trains, and the duties throughout the year including the events. S.W.O.T analysis was discussed (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). Growth and call volume was discussed. Life Save awards and medical interventions led to improved patient outcomes. 2027 plans were discussed. 2028 plans would like to include the addition of a second station. 2029 plans would like to add fire fighter and EMT personnel. 2030 plans would like to see fire training complex and joint training. 2031 plans would like to include fire training/investigator full time.

Director Jones was presented on behalf of the Public Works and Utilities Department. He discussed the 5-year plan. HAA5 violations were discussed. The drilling of the new well is expected to begin next week. City Manager Sumner gave an update from Carter & Sloope regarding the well. A drawing of the wastewater treatment plant was presented and stated the site is expandable for future improvements. Inflow and infiltration were discussed. He stated a lift station bypass is needed. A road paving needs list was presented. Director Jones stated we have a trench box but need an extension for it. Woodbridge Stormwater was shown to

demonstrate rising costs. Ponds were shown, it was stated the City will not acquire private ponds. He discussed MS4 requirements. We are specifically required by the state to provide an annual amnesty day where we take hazardous materials, but we simply can't afford to dispose of those materials. Multiple clean-up events are required as well and stated we are having difficulties getting volunteers to help, which is its intended purpose. Director Price stated she has a homeschool group that wants to assist with quarterly cleanups. The Randal and Grace Street ditch was discussed and stated the grant application was submitted. Asset management was discussed and was also touched on earlier in the day. Sidewalk repair needs were discussed. Director Price asked if privately owned trees would be removed to prevent damage to the new repairs. Discussion was held regarding those trees and city owned trees. Mayor Davis stated trees would be taken down where necessary. Preparation for in-house repairs of sidewalks is budgeted for FY26. The fountain is being prepped to be returned to City Hall. Ordinance needs were discussed. Types of ordinances needed are grease trap regulations; grass clippings; lift station specifications, including generators; as-built drawings on new subdivisions; and lighting standards for LED fixtures. And lastly, aging water lines were discussed.

Erica Castilla with Taylor Insurance presented information related to health insurance and requested an opportunity to quote the City. City Manager Sumner recommended we allow them the opportunity to quote.

Director Price spoke on the Main Street Program. She provided the 2025 Community Impact Report. She went over the mission and vision statements. Director Price discussed what the Main Street Program is and what the Main Street Four Point Approach is. She discussed community transformation strategies. She reported that we have achieved the Main Street Designation and discussed the benefits of maintaining the designation and why it is good for the community. The Main Street Board consists of 9 members, and she discussed their functions. She also discussed the Hahira Hype Team and their role. Highlights of 2025 were reviewed, as well as plans for 2026. She also discussed the Impact Report.

City Manager Sumner discussed administrative needs. He stated that 3% COLA adjustments have been approved each year except for FY16 and FY23 which were larger those years. Future adjustments were discussed. Councilman Lindsey asked if we could look at comparisons with Lowndes County rather than other cities. City Manager Sumner stated that it is our goal to get close to those numbers. Other ongoing administration projects were discussed. He discussed the Downtown Development Authority, as well as hotel/motel tax revenue. Future subdivision growth was discussed. He stated that North Lowndes Recreation Park is expected to grow and that brings the potential for an addition of a new road, specifically, a proposal of Morven Road Extension. He discussed interchange improvements. Coleman property, Williams property, King Court development, and Altman building construction were discussed.

City Manager Sumner paused to allow Ronnie Blanton, our current health care provider, to discuss the current health insurance. He has agreed to look at any potential other companies that could offer a better price for the city.

City Manager Sumner continued discussion regarding the Hahira Square future, including the potential to renovate the current City Hall and potentially building a new City Hall in the Square. North Square improvements were discussed. The Community Center issues were

discussed, including the potential to renovate the building or tear it down. City Manager Sumner will get quotes for minimal improvements to the building and report back.

Councilwoman White stated that she felt this was a good Retreat and that it is always good to be able to agree to disagree.


Mayor Davis agreed that we need the ordinances that were discussed.

Mayor Pro Tem Luke suggested the city add Polaris and Can Am to the golf cart ordinance. Chief Jones stated that the speed these vehicles can obtain is the issue.

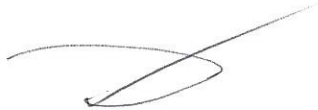
Lawson Farms has requested speed bumps.

City Manager Sumner stated that Shayla London has requested to rent the Hahira Square for vendors the weekend of the 22nd. It was stated that the Depot is already rented out at that time and it is not fair to the renter to take up the space. Shayla also asked about holding a parade for Black History Month. It was stated that there is a lot involved in preparing for a parade and that there is not enough time to get that organized this year.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 pm.



Mayor Terry Davis



Interim City Clerk Victoria Ingram