**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

1. **Disposition of property acquired to clear cloudy title or remedy blight: The City seeks a limited revision to the existing law which will reduce or eliminate the 20 year holding period when the purpose of condemnation is to clear title or eliminate blight, as defined in the existing eminent domain statute.**

**Explanation:** The City of Savannah previously used eminent domain, as a means of last resort, to acquire and clear cloudy title/heir property and to remedy blight. These properties were located in existing residential neighborhoods and were limited in size to relatively small lots. In 2006, the State of Georgia passed the “Landowners’ Bill of Rights and Private Property Protection Act,” which dramatically changed condemnation proceedings throughout the State.   While admirable in intent, a requirement that municipalities hold property acquired for the purpose of clearing title or remedying blight for 20 years after acquisition inadvertently stopped the acquisition and improvement of cloudy title/heir property and blighted property that contribute to crime and other associated problems.

Crime, blight, disinvestment, and associated problems in existing residential neighborhoods are often by-products of heir and other cloudy title properties.  Properties with cloudy title cannot be sold and cannot be improved with bank financing.  As they decay and/or become overgrown they negatively impact public safety and quality of life for neighborhood residents, property owners, and the community as a whole.

Being able to acquire property for the purpose of clearing cloudy title and remedying blight, then being able to advertise and sell this property without delay, provides interested heirs and others a chance to acquire property with clear title that can now be improved. This benefits heirs, neighborhoods, municipalities, and law enforcement, and protects the rights of nearby property owners with clear title.

**2. Commercial property tax relief: Address large and abrupt property valuation increases to commercial properties.**

**Explanation:** A number of locally-owned commercial properties received tremendous increases in property valuations in recent years. While rising property values are generally healthy, dramatic increases in property taxes can have a detrimental effect on small business owners.

The City of Savannah supports a targeted solution to address dramatic increases in valuations affecting owner-occupied small businesses.

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**3. Parole and Pardons Transparency:** **Increase transparency by requiring more thorough notifications and communication to allow local communities to have significantly greater knowledge and input when offenders are being considered for paroles and/or pardons.**

**Explanation:** The City has been alarmed in recent years by the number of potentially dangerous inmates the State Board of Pardons and Paroles has been releasing onto Savannah’s streets prior to the completion of their sentences. The Board’s decision-making process and criteria for granting these paroles are not explained to the public, local law enforcement or the District Attorney’s Office.

O.C.G.A 42-9-47 requires the Parole Board to notify the local district attorney, the sheriff, the victim and certain others within 72 hours of the Board’s decision to release an inmate on parole. The Statute, however, does not require reasonable advance notice of when the inmate will be released. As a result, local law enforcement is often left without ample time to assess the potential impacts of these releases.

**4. Identification Cards for Georgia Parolees:** **In an attempt to reduce recidivism rates for Georgia's parolees and those released from custody, it should be the intent of the Legislature to establish an inter-agency program between the Department of Corrections and Department of Motor Vehicles that provides inmates with identification cards upon their release from prison, providing them with an important tool for their reintegration into society.**

**Explanation:** The lack of proper identification for individuals recently released from prison is a major barrier to successful community reintegration. Inmates who have served long sentences may have outdated identification or lost it during their travel through the criminal justice system. The lack of an ID card leaves parolees unable to complete employment forms, apply for housing, open a bank account, cash or deposit a check, receive necessary medication, register for school, or enter a federal building.

**5. Confiscated weapons: Allow local governments to choose whether they’ll sell confiscated weapons at auction or have them destroyed.**

**Explanation:** State law passed in 2012 requires all law enforcement agencies in Georgia to auction off most of the guns they confiscate to licensed gun dealers if they cannot return them to the lawful owners.

Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police and the Counter Narcotics Team seize hundreds of guns per year. Gun-related violence is the most pressing public safety issue in Savannah today. There are far too many guns on our streets, and requiring law enforcement to reintroduce confiscated weapons into the community works against the efforts made by our law enforcement professionals.

We request that the law be changed to allow local jurisdictions the option of destroying confiscated weapons or selling them at auction.

**6. Drainage Improvements: State funding to assist Savannah with critical infrastructure improvements to increase public safety by lessening the threat of flooding.**

**Explanation:** Savannah is a low-lying coastal community ringed by tidal waterways that experiences sub-tropical rainfall events and hurricanes. This climate and geography have led to significant flooding issues in Savannah’s past. The City of Savannah has invested nearly $250 million over the past two decades to improve critical drainage infrastructure to lessen the threat of floods in our community. While conditions have improved dramatically, there remain areas of the City with significant drainage issues, particularly in sections of Savannah’s westside and midtown. These needed improvements will be both expensive and disruptive. The City seeks funding assistance to address these critical needs.