



CITY OF STATESBORO
WORK SESSION MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

Mayor & Council Work Session

50 East Main Street

4:00 PM

A Work Session of the Statesboro City Council was held on September 15, 2026 at 4:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 50 East Main Street. Present was Mayor Jonathan McColiar; 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. Robotics Center Presentation

Jan Moore, Vice president of Economic Development with Ogeechee Tech, presented an update on the Georgia Training Center for Industrial Operations. Ogeechee Technical College's growth in industrial training, noting that in Academic Year 2025 the college served 7,378 individual students, with over 4,200 participating in non-credit, employer-driven upskilling programs. She recounted the facility's origins, explaining that the college had been rapidly outgrowing its training space in the Industrial Technology Building. An initial attempt to secure state SLURP (pandemic surplus) funding in partnership with the county was unsuccessful, but the college subsequently pursued the project through the Georgia Technical College System, securing legislative appropriation funding of approximately \$24 million (escalating to an estimated \$27–\$28 million) in April 2023. Design and construction commenced shortly thereafter.

The resulting 40,000-square-foot facility is located on the corner of a road off U.S. 301, near the Georgia State Patrol building. Ms. Moore noted the building was intentionally designed with abundant natural light and modern aesthetics to reflect the reality of today's manufacturing environments, citing Hyundai as an example of a bright, clean, and modern facility. The building's official name — the Georgia Training Center for Industrial Operations — was chosen deliberately to signal its regional mission, extending beyond Ogeechee Tech's standard service delivery area.

Ms. Moore highlighted several notable program distinctions: the college is one of only two FANUC-certified FAST training sites in the country, one of two Rockwell Automation training sites, and one of two Mitsubishi controller training sites nationally. The college is also one of three Amazon mechatronics and robotics apprenticeship training locations in the country and is considered the top-ranked of those three. She noted that Amazon apprentices occupy approximately 27 percent of qualifying hotel rooms in Statesboro at any given time, representing several million dollars in hotel spending alone. The college is contracted to train 550 Amazon apprentices in calendar year 2027.

Upon opening — with a ribbon cutting scheduled for October 15 and training expected to begin around October 5 — the facility will be capable of supporting up to 460,000 training hours annually. The college currently employs 10 full-time instructors with a combined 92-plus years of industry experience. Ms. Moore noted that credentials issued since 2024 alone have exceeded 6,000. Projected economic impact for FY2026 stands at approximately \$12 million, rising to \$13.2 million in FY2027 and approximately \$16 million in subsequent years. Training-related earnings (excluding grant funding) exceeded \$3 million in the past fiscal year. Graduates of 12-week programs are entering the workforce at salaries ranging from \$72,000 to \$78,000.

Mrs. Moore noted the significant local economic footprint of the Amazon program, estimating that apprentices occupy approximately 27% of eligible hotel rooms in the city at any given time, representing several million dollars in hotel spending alone. We were awarded approximately \$20 million in legislative funding in April 2023 to build the 4,000 sq. foot building called Georgia Training Center for Industrial Operations, also referred to as The Robotics Center. The center currently has 10 full time instructors, projected to deliver up to 460,000 training hours annually. No other

Technical College in Georgia has this nor will be able to train at the level we can. We will serve a greater area than just the Ogeechee Tech area and that is specifically why it is named the Georgia Training Center for Industrial Operations, to reflect its intended role as a regional not just a local training destination. An independent economic impact analysis projects the center's annual economic impact will grow from approximately \$12 million in FY 26 to approximately \$16 million in subsequent years, with labor income of \$6.2 million and a gross regional product contribution of \$9.8 million. The ribbon cutting will be October 15, 2026, with training expected to commence as early as October 5th, 2026. Mrs. Moore invited Mayor and Council to come out and tour the building.

Council members were invited to attend the October 15 ribbon cutting at 11:00 a.m.

2. Statesboro Convention and Visitors Bureau

Becky Sanders, Executive Director, along with Justin Samples, Vice President of Marketing and Operations, of Visit Statesboro (Statesboro Convention and Business Bureau) presented an overview of the organization's operations and marketing programs. The Bureau's role is representing the city and county to visitors, event planners, newcomers, and job candidates. The economic significance of visitor spending in Bulloch County, in 2024 alone, visitors spent over \$174 million, generating just over \$13 million in state and local taxes — equivalent to a tax savings of \$437 per household — and supporting more than 1,800 jobs. He described tourism as a self-reinforcing economic cycle in which visitor spending supports local businesses, creates jobs, increases tax revenue, and ultimately spurs further development and visitation.

Mr. Samples explained that Visit Statesboro is 100 percent funded by the lodging tax, with Statesboro currently levying a 6 percent rate, of which the bureau receives approximately 0.5 percent, while the county is currently levying at a 5 percent rate and the bureau receive .6 percent. He described the organization's use of geolocation-based data analytics to understand visitor origin, spending behavior, demographics, and hotel performance metrics, allowing the bureau to target marketing dollars with precision. He noted, for example, that while Atlanta produces the highest volume of visitors, Albany visitors spend significantly more per visit — information that directly informs marketing investment decisions. Mr. Samples gave an overview of Visit Statesboro's marketing strategies across owned, paid, and earned media channels, including social media, digital display, pre-roll video, and connected television advertising. He highlighted a major brand campaign undertaken using pandemic-era reserve funds, which produced over 5 million impressions, 57,000 searches, and 870 room nights attributable to the campaign during its run. A campaign like that should ideally be refreshed every two to three years but current funding levels do not allow for it.

Mr. Samples then presented a case for increasing Statesboro's lodging tax from 6 percent to 8 percent. He noted that 85 percent of Georgia communities under the same statute are already at 8 percent, including nearby communities such as Sylvania and Swainsboro. Eight of the top ten tourism destinations in Georgia are also at 8 percent. Based on 2024–2025 figures, the increase is conservatively estimated to generate an additional \$530,000 in annual lodging tax revenue, a figure that does not yet account for demand fluctuations or the three hotels anticipated to come online in 2027–2028.

City Manager Charles Penny explained the procedural path: the City Council must first pass a resolution supporting the increase, which is then approved at the state legislative level before returning to the Council for final adoption. He noted the legislature returns to session in January, leaving approximately 60 days to engage the local delegation. The Council expressed general support for the increase.

City Manager Charles Penny suggested the item could be brought back for further discussion at a subsequent work session if needed.

3. Housing Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Update

Justin Williams, director of Planning and Development, presented a comprehensive update on the City's Housing Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program, which was funded through two \$2.5 million ARPA allocations for a total of \$5 million dedicated to housing rehabilitation.

The program originated from surveys conducted as part of the City's Georgia Initiative for Community Housing, which identified significant concentrations of dilapidated housing in four core neighborhoods: Johnson Street, MLK, Mulberry

Street, and the Whitesville neighborhood. (A fifth neighborhood, Black Bottom, was originally included but has since been substantially revitalized and removed from the urban redevelopment area list.) The program required all funds to be committed by December 31, 2024, and fully expended by the end of 2026. The housing rehabilitation side will meet that deadline. The program was structured through a competitive bid process resulting in the selection of Insight Planning and Development as the program administrator. Eligibility required applicants to be the owner of record, current on local property taxes, within CDBG-aligned income thresholds, and to hold clear title to their property.

Of 105 total applications received, approximately 53 were accepted into the intake process. Eight homes have been fully reconstructed, one reconstruction is currently under construction and expected to be completed within two weeks, and one rehabilitation project is being finalized. Twelve applications were halted due to unresolvable title issues. Total expenditures to date stand at approximately \$5.1 million, including ARPA funds and an additional \$300,000 in ARPA interest allocated by the Council to support reconstruction.

Several significant challenges encountered during implementation which included title defects were pervasive many applicants believed they owned their homes outright but lacked clear title due to unresolved probate matters, verbal transfer agreements, or open liens. Construction cost substantially exceeded original projections; the initial \$50,000 rehabilitation cap proved inadequate almost immediately, and estimated that a comprehensive rehabilitation today cannot realistically be completed for under \$75,000. Floodplain homes in the Johnson Street area required elevation, hydrology studies, and elevation certificates, significantly increasing per-unit costs. Relocation assistance was needed for a larger number of households than anticipated due to asbestos abatement and lead paint remediation requirements. Contractor availability was also a significant obstacle, with the initial competitive bidding round consuming approximately five months with limited local contractor participation.

Early applications for CDBG and CHIP grants were denied because the city lacked a track record in housing programs. However, in 2026 the City successfully received both a CHIP grant for new construction housing and an infrastructure CDBG grant, reflecting the program's maturation.

Potential paths moving forward are continue the housing rehabilitation using CDBG and CHIP funding; shifting focus to urgent repair programs addressing critical systems such as roofs; pursuing weatherization funding in partnership with local nonprofits; or discontinuing the rehabilitation program and focusing resources on new affordable housing construction — an effort already underway, with a related ordinance on the evening's regular agenda.

City Manager Charles Penny shared the importance of engaging both the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the local state legislative delegation regarding DCA's funding model. He noted that unlike states such as North Carolina — which operate "small cities" CDBG programs that allow non-entitlement communities to apply for housing rehabilitation funds — Georgia's DCA has historically directed CDBG funding toward infrastructure rather than housing rehab. He stressed that without a structural change in DCA policy, housing conditions in communities like Statesboro will continue to deteriorate, as another ARPA funding cannot be anticipated.

4. Art Park Discussion – Trees

Assistant City Manager, Jason Boyles, presented options for addressing the lack of shade in the Downtown Art Park, a concern raised by members of the public, park visitors, and Council members. The original park design was a xeriscape concept with no landscaping, featuring recycled white rock and a French drain system designed to manage stormwater through the aggregate material.

Mr. Boyles outlined several operational and design concerns associated with adding vegetation at this stage. The introduction of trees and traditional landscaping would disrupt the underground drainage infrastructure because of their root system. Additionally, organic plant material would stain the white rock; trees and vegetation would obstruct sightlines through the park from the street; and the park is used for holiday events — including placement of a large Christmas tree — which requires vehicle and equipment access that would be impeded by landscaping.

In place of trees, Mr. Boyles presented two alternative shade structure options. The first is a shade canopy structure with two benches, estimated at under \$20,000, which could be located in the front right corner of the park while maintaining

visibility and drainage integrity. The second option is a set of triangular shade sail structures, similar to those shown in an earlier conceptual plan, to be installed in the back left corner of the park at an estimated cost of approximately \$15,000, also with benches underneath. He indicated that SPLOST interest funds may be available to fund whichever option the Council chooses to pursue.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:27 pm

Jonathan McCollar, Mayor

Leah Harden, City Clerk