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The Douglas reimagines the boutique hotel experience



The Oglethorpe Avenue entrance to The Douglas boutique hotel in Savannah, Georgia Historic District.
PHOTOS BY RICHARD BURKHART/SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS

Evan Lasseter

Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Of course, a hotel isn’t a home. But the team behind the transformation of the former Ballastone Inn into The Douglas, 14 E. Oglethorpe Ave., want it to feel that way. The guest parlor retains a Victorian-era fireplace and mantle, topped with a bust donning a fedora hat as a gold-framed mirror hangs above. A wooden checkerboard sits on a coffee table surrounded by midcentury furnishings: two silver leather chairs and a forest floral settee in shades of emerald green, russet and cream. Just like any historic downtown Savannah home that has aged gracefully from one period to the next.

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A view down the staircase during a tour of The Douglas boutique hotel in Savannah, Georgia Historic District August 21.

CEMA tells residents to prepare for mandatory evacuations

Ansley Franco

Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Chatham Emergency Management Agency (CEMA) has unveiled a new evacuation plan for the 2025 hurricane season, including an agreement with Macon-Bibb County to shelter residents in the event of a major storm. While hurricane season runs from June 1 to Nov. 30, peak activity typically occurs between mid-August and October. Chelsea Sawyer, who leads CEMA’s Community Preparedness Division, said the plan has been months in the making and is designed for a “worst-case scenario” evacuation. For the first time, Chatham County has a formal agreement with Macon-Bibb to house up to 3,000 evacuees across 10 to 12 shelters. “It’s not a lavish experience,” Sawyer said. “If you need this and your only other choice is to stay at home, please choose this option because staying at home is not the safe option.” Mandatory evacuation orders are issued when storms reach Category 3 strength or higher, meaning winds above 111 mph. If an order is given, residents without transportation will be directed to the Enmarket Arena. Chatham Area Transit (CAT) will offer free bus service to the arena and the downtown bus station. Once inside the arena, evacuees will be grouped in the stands. Those wishing to travel together should sit together, Sawyer said. Each person will be limited to one or two hand-carried bags. And Sawyer recommends bringing items such as pillows or blankets to make shelter stays more comfortable. Other items to bring include external battery packs, medication, change of clothing, flashlights and personal hygiene supplies. People should not

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Traffic deaths show signs of decline as Vision Zero expands

Evan Lasseter

Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Savannah is on pace to have its safest summer in terms of traffic fatalities in city history. The city has gone without a traffic fatality during the summer, so far, and if the official end of the season passes without a traffic death, it would be the first summer without a traffic fatality on record. There have been five traffic fatalities in 2025, thus far, a statistic city leaders

say shows progress. “This is a really low number for us at this point in the year,” said Savannah Police Department Captain Bradley Beddow, who presented collision data to council at its Aug. 28 meeting. If this pattern holds, the number of traffic fatalities will be lower than in recent years. In 2022 and 2024, there were 14 deaths. The peak within the past three years was in 2023, when there were 19 fatalities. Thursday’s update comes as city council has made traffic calming a priority in recent years. A previous council

launched the Vision Zero initiative in 2022, and earlier this year the current council lowered speed limits on more than 70 roads. “Of course, Vision Zero is focused on zero. The numbers we saw, of course, we are happy they are trending down, but think of those numbers as someone who may be related to you,” said Savannah’s Transportation Coordinator Harold Taylor. “We want to keep that in the forefront. These are numbers of people that are part of our community or visitors that come to visit us.”

The tenor of Thursday’s meeting contrasted with that of a similar workshop from roughly one year ago, where council members expressed frustration with the progress of Vision Zero. District 6 Alderman Kurtis Purtee made a fiery speech at last year’s meeting due to no traffic calming devices being added to his district. But Thursday, Purtee said he is seeing progress. “I’m glad I don’t have to do that today; I am actually quite impressed with what I’m seeing,” Purtee said.

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