



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
REGULAR SESSION
MONDAY, December 7, 2020 – 7:00 PM
Via Teleconference**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

David Eady – Mayor
George Holt – Councilmember
James Windham – Councilmember
Jeff Wearing – Councilmember
Laura McCanless – Councilmember
Avis Williams – Councilmember
Lynn Bohanan – Councilmember

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Pepper – City Manager
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Jody Reid – Public Works Supervisor
David Strickland – City Attorney

OTHERS PRESENT: Charlie Williams (Mt. Zion First Baptist Church), Mike Ready, Art Vinson,

1. The meeting was called to order by the Hon. David Eady, Mayor.
2. Invocation – Charlie Williams (Mt. Zion First Baptist Church).
3. Pledge of Allegiance.
4. **A motion was made by Avis Williams to accept the Agenda for December 7, 2020. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).**
(Attachment A)
5. **A motion was made by Avis Williams to accept the Consent Agenda for December 7, 2020. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).** (Attachment B)
6. **Mayor's Report**
Mayor Eady acknowledged and thanked Pastor Williams for his congregation's continued service to the community and willingness to serve as a focal point for those in need and a drop-off point for donations. He asked Pastor Williams for an update on COVID-19 community outreach.

Pastor Williams stated things are going well with the COVID-19 Relief Center. They have served over 70 families so far in this project. Resources have been donated by Oxford Organic Farm, the Oxford Dining Hall, the Oxford Lions Club, Grace United Methodist Church, and Ministry in Action.

They are collecting items every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and distributing every Monday from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m. Volunteers are welcome to come and help. Pastor Williams recognized Laura Gafnea and Daniel Parsons from Oxford College for coming to help and for bringing items for donation. Charlie Phillips and Donna Sneed have provided support and Marcia Brooks has helped by putting information out on City of Oxford social media.

Items needed for the COVID-19 Relief Center are non-perishable food items, canned goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh meat items, bottled water, hand sanitizer, bathroom soap, toilet tissue, other toiletry items, paper towels, clean cloths, baby supplies and shoes. On November 20th, the church started their feeding ministry back up and were able to service 95 people with meals.

They are planning to compile holiday boxes and need assistance from the community. In the past they have given out 15-20 boxes and hope to give out more this year. These boxes are given to families specifically recommended to the church. They plan to assemble the boxes on December 19th. The cost to sponsor a box is \$25. They will gladly accept monetary and non-monetary donations. Pastor Williams can be reached 404-250-2723 to recommend a family for a Christmas box. Each box includes a meat item, macaroni and cheese, green beans, cranberry sauce, a dessert, and ½ gallon beverage.

Mayor Eady stated that these efforts are the culmination of a coordinated effort to bring the resources of the community together to help alleviate the burdens brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Oxford community. The group began meeting October 18th and includes the area churches, the City of Oxford, the Oxford Lions Club. Over Thanksgiving he had heard that people were looking for rides to First United Methodist Church in Covington for the meal they were serving. The boxes are a great way for the Oxford community to help these people.

Pastor Williams stated that donations can be made out to Mt. Zion First Baptist Church. He is working on setting up an account specifically for the Oxford COVID-19 Relief Center.

James Windham stated he was not aware these activities were going on. He does recall some plans being discussed but was not aware of the planned activities. He asked that Councilmembers be kept apprised of such developments. He also expressed concern that some people do not have computers and may not hear about the activities through social media.

Mayor Eady stated that Rust Chapel UMC, Allen Memorial UMC, and Mt. Zion First Baptist did focus on getting the word out through their congregations. The City of Oxford is serving as an information source.

Mr. Windham also asked that Pastor Williams let the City know as soon as the account is set up, since people have different beliefs and are in different denominations, and some may have reservations donating to Mt. Zion First Baptist Church.

Mayor Eady asked if anyone becomes aware of other things going on in the community to please let City Hall know.

7. **Planning Commission Recommendations/Petitions**

None.

8. **Citizen Concerns**

Pastor Williams wanted to express to Mr. Windham that everything is being done by his congregation decent and in order regarding the collection of funds for the COVID-19 Relief Center. He plans to have the separate account established by the following week and will inform City Hall when it is available. Mr. Windham indicated he did not intend to question the motives of Pastor Williams or the church and apologized if his statement was received that way.

9. **Solar Power Purchase Contract with MEAG** (Attachment C)

The City of Oxford has an opportunity to diversify its power resources to include solar energy. Steve Jackson from MEAG presented information about this opportunity at a previous City Council meeting. City Attorney David Strickland reviewed the proposed contract with MEAG and had no concerns. The contract is being finalized by MEAG. At this time MEAG would like a commitment from the City of Oxford to purchase 4 MW of power under the new contract so they can include that amount in the negotiations they are finalizing. Mayor Eady would like to have a vote affirming this commitment. The proposal would result in significant savings to the City during the next ten years. Mayor Eady asked if anyone would like to make a motion or if there are additional questions.

Laura McCanless made a motion to affirm the City of Oxford's commitment to purchase 4 MW from MEAG under the proposed contract arrangement. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion.

George Holt asked if the City knows exactly what the total possible obligation would be under the contract. Mayor Eady clarified that Mr. Holt is referring to the step-up charge in the contract which stipulates that if a city fails to pay their share, the other participating cities will be responsible for their cost. Mayor Eady stated that each city's potential step-up obligation per defaulting city is capped at the percent their share is of the entire deal. The total possible obligation cannot be calculated until MEAG can finalize the number of participants and their MW commitments.

Mr. Holt stated that although he is uncomfortable with this, he will probably vote to approve it. Mayor Eady stated that the vote on the table currently is contingent on finalization of the contract. If the contract terms are not acceptable, the City does not have to execute the contract. Ms. McCanless pointed out that this vote is nonbinding.

James Windham requested a booklet with terms to help City Council members understand issues related to power purchases. He also expressed concerns about entering into an agreement that would benefit Georgia Power and allow them to continue polluting the environment.

Mayor Eady stated the City could work with MEAG to come up with a guide for terms, particularly since there are three new City Councilmembers. He asked Matt Pepper to take note of this and he and Mr. Pepper will follow up with MEAG to try to come up with something.

Regarding the Georgia Power concern, MEAG purchases power from many different sources, one of which is Georgia Power. They also own a share of some plants through capital investments, such as Plant Scherer, which has been upgraded in recent years and is much more efficient. One of the most polluting plants, Wansley, is scheduled for shutdown in the near future. This plan is a solar power portion of MEAG's integrated resource plan which will allow getting out from under Wansley. The solar power developer will not be Georgia Power.

The proposed plan will reduce the City's reliance on Georgia Power. Currently when the City needs more power than it has, it must purchase power on the market, which consists mainly of gas- and coal-fired power. This plan eliminates that need, and also makes the City of Oxford non-emitting and not a contributor of carbon emissions associated with Oxford's power consumption.

Mr. Windham stated a list of the pros and cons is helpful. Mayor Eady also clarified that under the proposed plan the City is not making a capital investment. The commitment is only to purchase power.

Mr. Windham asked what city is making the largest commitment. Mayor Eady advised we do not know that yet, but he suspects most cities are committing in the <10 MW range. Mr. Windham asked Mayor Eady to pull some information together on what the potential ceiling is. Mr. Holt added that he has reviewed all the documentation and cannot make such a determination.

Mayor Eady stated Mr. Jackson can come back to address further questions. He also pointed out that Mr. Jackson previously advised the City Council that they would try to sell the power on the market before passing a member's obligation on to other members in the event of a default.

Mayor Eady restated the motion on the table, which is to commit to support the City's share of 4 MW of the deal, nonbinding contractually. This is under the assumption that the numbers provided previously reflect the final estimates and that the risk associated with the step-up clause is deemed to be a reasonable risk to the City Council. The City Council will still vote on the actual contract.

Laura McCanless amended her motion to make it a nonbinding commitment to commit to 4 MW of power under the proposed agreement with MEAG. George Holt seconded the amended motion. The motion was passed unanimously (7/0).

10. **Dried Indian Creek Corridor Project** (Attachment D)

Mayor Eady provided a recap of the previous discussion on October 19, 2020 for the University of Georgia (UGA) proposal for the Dried Indian Creek watershed assessment. The watershed assessment is a prerequisite for applying for a grant from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to restore the creek to a healthy state. Much of the land along the creek corridor is privately owned. Grant funds will help to defer the cost of paying for conservation easements and property acquisitions to protect the land.

Since the October presentation, the City has talked with the City of Covington and Newton County about possible collaboration on the project. The City of Covington is excited about the prospect of collaborating. They have several projects in the works along their portion of the creek corridor. Newton County also supports protecting the creek corridor but does not have any specific plans for the area. Mayor Eady plans to meet with Mayor Steve Horton and Chairman Banes to discuss particulars. At a minimum he would like to get them to sign a letter of commitment and support to accompany the City's grant application. The grant application is due around August/September of 2021.

There are a number of things that need to be done in advance of submitting the application that will support a robust grant proposal. The City is working with the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) to prepare the grant application. NEGRC has advised the City that the watershed assessment is needed as a baseline component to successfully compete for the grant.

Mayor Eady reached out to UGA because of the success in the past working on projects with them. He contacted Donnie Longnecker who put him in touch with Don Calabria, who is an expert in doing watershed assessments and also has access to students who can be utilized to reduce the labor cost of the assessment. Dr. Calabria also has access to engineering resources on campus who can assist with modeling to determine the cost of intervention(s) needed to restore the creek corridor.

UGA has submitted a proposal to conduct the assessment for \$36,631.00. Dr. Calabria will have access to student resources during Spring semester, so a decision on the proposal is needed soon. However, a vote can be tabled if the City Council would like more information or has additional questions.

Laura McCanless stated she liked the proposal's clarity and its description of the deliverables.

James Windham expressed concern that the County has no plans to protect the portion of the creek corridor north of the Oxford city limits. He is afraid dumping could occur in that area and impact the portion of the creek that flows through the City. He also wants to ensure that once the assessment is complete, no additional funds will be necessary to apply for the grant.

Mayor Eady acknowledged that the land Mr. Windham is referring to is privately owned, and the grant is intended to help pay for conservation easements or land acquisitions on these types of properties.

Mr. Windham identified some property East of Soule Street in the Covington city limits that is privately owned. He would like to know what the City of Covington's long-range plans are for this area.

George Holt advised he shares Mr. Windham's concerns. He does not understand why there is a proposal for money to be spent to obtain a grant, yet it is not known how much will be needed for the grant. He wants to make sure that the assessment will cover the requirements for the grant.

Mayor Eady advised the grant program is the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program. Grant amounts range from \$.5 million to \$3 million. The requirements are available on the DNR website.

Mr. Holt stated that the requirements should have been presented to the City Council initially, and Mayor Eady has all of that information, but Mr. Holt does not.

Mayor Eady acknowledged that many of the details for the grant application are unknown at this time. The deadline is in August or September of 2021, but the watershed assessment takes some time, and this work product must be included with the application in order to know what type of intervention is needed to restore the creek corridor to a healthy state. This information is needed in order to have the conversations with the landowners. The assessment will cover the entire length of the creek starting at the headwaters.

Avis Williams stated she had some of the same concerns as Mr. Windham and Mr. Holt, but the more it is discussed, the more she understands the proposal.

Lynn Bohanan stated she had similar concerns and questioned what would happen if the City of Oxford invests the money and the other jurisdictions do not contribute or support the City's efforts in any way. She also wanted to make clear that she believes it is a worthwhile project but is a bit scared of taking on the project without any support. Mayor Eady stated that the City of Oxford has set aside \$50,000 each year for the next five years in the Capital Budget. At the worst, the City of Oxford will be spending \$36,000 on the assessment and know what needs to be done. The City could then talk to the property owners, many of which are interested in protecting the property.

Mr. Windham stated the City needs to know which type of easement can be offered to property owners, a county easement or federal easement. The type of easement that can be offered may have tax implications for the property owners. The City also needs to know what width of easement is needed.

Mayor Eady stated the width of the easement needed will not be known until the watershed assessment is completed.

Mr. Windham strongly recommended putting pressure on the City of Covington and Newton County to join the City of Oxford on the grant application, as doing so will bolster the odds of getting a grant. He also recommended taking some positive steps now starting on the West side of the creek to put in a trail or do something to demonstrate a front-end commitment. An appraiser will also likely be needed, which will cost additional money.

Ms. McCanless expressed her understanding that \$36,000 is a lot of money to spend but felt it would help get the much bigger grant which would benefit the City greatly. Since the City does have \$50,000 budgeted for the project, this expenditure would fit nicely. The Sustainability Committee is working very hard to try to make this project come together. They are working with community partners and state agencies in addition to the City of Covington and Newton County.

Jeff Wearing felt that having the assessment done is a step toward protecting the creek corridor on the East side of the City. He would be in favor of proceeding.

Mayor Eady's concern is timing. While he does not disagree with anyone's recommendations, he feels the City does not have any good basis for prioritizing what is done to the creek corridor without the science and engineering the assessment would provide. The money was budgeted for this purpose in the Capital Budget.

Mr. Holt stated he thought the money in the Capital Budget was intended for land acquisitions to protect the City on the East side. He feels more conversations are needed with the landowners before money is spent on the assessment. Mayor Eady stated the discussions with the landowners will occur concurrently with the assessment, and some have already taken place. But the specifics, such as the width of easement needed for each piece of property, can only be obtained logically from the assessment. If the City waits until after it has communicated with all landowners, it will be too late to apply in the current grant cycle.

Mr. Windham stated he will vote to approve the proposal for the watershed assessment, but he would like to hear more from the Sustainability Committee concerning their overall goal with this project, since they are pushing this project.

Mayor Eady stated that he is actually the main one pushing this project. The Sustainability Committee has been doing a lot of work to move the project along from a conceptual idea to an actionable plan via the grant application through DNR.

Ms. McCanless thanked Mayor Eady for collecting information and speaking to officials and landowners. The grant changed the game for the committee. Initially they were thinking about piecemeal purchases of land on the East side to create a buffer zone. When they found out about the grant's range of award, their goals shifted. They began to consider what they could do with that kind of money. The ultimate proposal would include connectivity from the headwaters to the Yellow River and linkage of trails. This proposal creates zero-carbon transportation and access to outdoor recreational and natural opportunities for people that do not have access to such opportunities currently. The

proposal not only would restore the creek to a healthy state but would also provide social and community benefits that are tangible and intangible.

Mr. Holt thanked Ms. McCanless for her comments that tied everything together. He felt that he understood the project much better as a result of her comments.

Mr. Windham asked for a commitment from the City Council that if the City does not get the grant, it will still use the assessment to make some improvements to the creek corridor. He also would like for the Sustainability Committee to start looking at strategies for the West side of the City.

Jeff Wearing made a motion to accept the proposal from John Calabria. Laura McCanless seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

11. **Voting Delegates for the Electric Cities of Georgia Board** (Attachment E)

Staff proposes updating the voting delegates for the Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG) Board to appoint the Mayor as the delegate and the Mayor Pro Tem as the alternate so that the appointment will not need to be updated each time the persons in these positions change.

James Windham made a motion to approve the resolution appointing the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem as the voting delegate and alternate for the ECG Board. Laura McCanless seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

12. **Invoices** (Attachment F)

The Council reviewed the invoices paid by the City of Oxford for \$1,000 or more in November 2020. Marcia Brooks provided one correction to the documented distributed: City of Oxford utility charges for 10/14/20 – 11/16/20 should have been listed as \$1,771.96 instead of \$1,236.97.

George Holt asked if the invoice from Great Estates Landscaping was only for spreading mulch. Mayor Eady stated it sounds like it is for all their monthly services, since it mentions a discount for July.

Mr. Holt asked what the City plans to do with 100 copies of *Images of America – Oxford*. Mayor Eady stated the City will make them available for sale. There has been interest from the public on where they can get copies of the book. The City of Oxford obtained the books at author (Erik Oliver) cost. The book retails for \$22.00. We can sell them at retail cost if desired.

13. **Executive Session**

James Windham made a motion to go to Executive Session at 8:57 p.m. Lynn Bohanan seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

The Council entered executive session to discuss personnel matters.

James Windham made a motion to exit Executive Session at 9:08 p.m. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

14. Adjourn

A motion was made by James Windham to adjourn at 9:08 p.m. Lynn Bohanan seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer