



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, AUGUST 19, 2024 – 6:32 PM
CITY HALL**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

David Eady - Mayor
George Holt – Councilmember
Jim Windham – Councilmember
Laura McCanless – Councilmember
Jeff Wearing – Councilmember
Mike Ready – Councilmember
Erik Oliver – Councilmember

STAFF PRESENT:

Stacey Mullen – Deputy City Clerk
Bill Andrew – City Manager
Mark Anglin – Police Chief
Jody Reid – Supervisor of Maintenance and
Utilities

OTHERS PRESENT: Cheryl Budd, Theresa Eady, Lynn Branham Sammons, Robert Lane, Sam Hay, Judy Greer, Nick Cole, Robert Renwick, Mick McQuaide, Louise Eady, Sarah Standard, Nick Cole, Hugh Burnette, Ginger Baldwin, Laura Gafnea (Oxford College), Rev. Tim Dees (Allen Memorial United Methodist Church), Nyasha Bennett (The Event LLC)

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor's Announcements

Mayor Eady announced his intention to sign an agreement with Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) to apply for CDBG funds for replacing transite pipe in several locations within the City of Oxford. The fee is \$6,000. If the grant is awarded, the cost is covered by the grant. There was no opposition from Councilmembers. GEFA loan options are also being reviewed as possible funding sources for this project.

2. Committee Reports

- a. **Trees, Parks, and Recreation Board** – Theresa Eady provided the report. She read the TPR's recommendation regarding the installation of parking spaces along Fletcher Street for Old Church events, and the committee's concern about damage to trees from increased parking activity.
- b. **Sustainability Committee** – Laura McCanless provided the report. Mayor Eady discussed asking Newton County Tomorrow to work on a project through its Archway partnership to create nature parks on the Giles and Little properties.
- c. **Downtown Development Authority** – Robert Lane spoke about parking space opportunities related to the new building planned for the corner of Whatcoat Street and George Street, and

the developer's willingness to discuss sharing the cost of additional spaces beyond the current plan.

3. **Old Church Management and Renovation Proposals** (Attachment B)

Mayor Eady suggested discussing parking spaces along Wesley Street using permeable materials and creating a 30-foot buffer between the spaces and the trees lining the street. He also suggested looking at the option of ADA-accessible parking behind Old Church. Other options that can be discussed are prohibiting parking along the streets and having the event management company negotiate agreements for shuttling people to and from events at Old Church.

George Holt stated that he believes the number of spaces in the concept design is too many for that area.

Erik Oliver clarified that the concept design includes zero parking spaces. The proposal was intended to make what is happening now safer by shoring up the shoulders and making it still look the same. The drawing shows the maximum capacity along Wesley Street and Fletcher Street. The design suggests more use of the church than has occurred in the past resulting from the City Council's plans to have an event management company manage the use of the building and market it.

Mike Ready stated he would like to hear how many trees would be impacted, and options that would help protect them. He is also interested in some type of curbing that would make it look more natural. He agrees that the number of vehicles depicted is too high for that area but pointed out that the drawing is just a starting place.

Laura McCanless stated that the discussion has been that there would be about one event per week at Old Church under the proposed management contract. There would be impacts to the tree root systems and a new stormwater drainage system would also be required. The cost to do this work is a major concern to her. She does not feel that money should be spent until it is known how successful the event management initiative will be. If it is successful, the increase in activity will be slow.

Jim Windham expressed concerns about what Old Church is costing the City and what the return would be. Laura McCanless also mentioned that the return for the community should be considered. Mayor Eady stated that the event management contract is intended to cover marketing fees and maintenance costs. Bill Andrew also mentioned that since the majority of the events that will be managed by the company would be weekend weddings, there would be opportunities to hold events open to the public during the week for little or no admission cost.

Jeff Wearing stated that Old Church is important to the community, and it needs to be used. If it's not used it will deteriorate faster. There is no intent to impose negative impacts on the residents by allowing parking. Parking is needed for the site if events will be held there.

Theresa Eady spoke to the City Council regarding her personal thoughts related to use of Old Church.

- Buildings like the Old Church need to be preserved and nurtured, but not commercialized.

- Why do we need to make the Old Church an official event facility when it's already used as one?
- Cost-benefit analysis is needed.
- Residential impact – more cars in the street, more noise, more people in Oxford.
- Financial impact – why spend citizens' money to bring Old Church up to standards of other event facilities if not to make a profit? Would need to hold an event at least once per week to make it viable as an event space.
- Zoning restrictions – why is loud music and additional parking permitted for Old Church events and not for other areas of Oxford?
- Citizens of Oxford as owners of Old Church should have input into the appropriate use of Old Church. Why has no input been obtained by the Committee assigned to consider the Events Management contract?
- Limited use such as once per month would be acceptable but probably not profitable.

Louise Eady spoke to the City Council regarding the character of Old Church and how parking would negatively impact the feel of the area.

Rev. Tim Dees, pastor at Allen Memorial United Methodist Church, spoke to the City Council in agreement with the other statements. He lives in the parsonage next door to Old Church and is concerned about frequent parking and loud music, as well as use of a house of worship for secular activities. He also believes the aesthetic of the neighborhood would be negatively impacted.

Lynn Branham Sammons expressed her agreement with the points that have been made, and also shared her concerns about the plan diminishing the quality of life for residents and property values on Fletcher Street and Wesley Street. She does agree with the need for ADA accessible parking for the facility. She also feels that allowing parking along the streets more frequently would be offensive to the residents and would block some driveways. The appeal of the approach to Old Church on Fletcher Street would also be diminished.

Theresa Eady stated that parking along the street every weekend or shuttles traveling through the neighborhood would be invasive.

Jim Windham asked if those in attendance are in favor of continuing the status quo. Louise Eady stated that the building needs to be used more. It should not be empty. He stated that alternative suggestions are needed if they want it to be used.

Nyasha Bennett with The Event LLC (the event management company for Old Church) expressed her appreciation for vintage things. She currently owns a building in Mansfield that is over 150 years old and wished to preserve it. People use it for baby showers, graduation parties, birthday parties. She loves Oxford. She does not want to disrupt people's lives but does want Old Church to have a heartbeat. She mentioned that parking could possibly be at Oxford College. They will make it work. They do not want to disrupt the quiet environment of Oxford. They do recommend a deck with a covered pavilion to accommodate a better variety of events. She hopes that there will be some walking to events, encouraging a walking community. She agreed that businesses want to make money, but their contract structure does not result in money for them unless the City of Oxford makes money.

Bill Andrew stated that the reason an event management company is being engaged is because of logistics. Even having only a few events a year as happens now requires a great deal of extra time and coordination. He is currently handling this as best he can, but a professional presence is needed.

Mike McQuaide contended that the issue of parking is independent of the utility of Old Church. These are two separate issues that are being combined into one. Old Church can be used more often without disrupting the community, taking down trees, etc. Regarding the suggestion of installing parking behind Old Church, there are three springs right behind the building that flow into Turkey Creek. Parking behind the church would damage this area.

Erik Oliver stated that given his and his father's involvement with the Trees, Parks, and Recreation Board and preservation of the Yarbrough Oak, he would not recommend anything that would cause damage to trees.

Mayor Eady stated that Mr. Oliver's drawing is simply manifesting an idea, and options are being considered. He appreciates the input and acknowledges that it is needed, but he wishes that some input had been given at previous meetings, as this topic has been under discussion for some time. Currently the City is considering having an analysis completed of what is possible, and one of the questions to be addressed in the analysis is whether something can be done without harming trees.

Hugh Burnette stated that it has already been said that filling in the ditches along Fletcher Street and Wesley Street would kill the trees. That alone should be enough to abort any plans to work on the shoulders of the streets that involve filling them in. Noise would also be a problem, and contracts should address this issue. He also indicated that he is considering working on the house on his property and moving there and would need to know the City's plans before he can proceed with that.

Ginger Baldwin expressed her agreement that events at Old Church are a good thing, but the City should be very restrictive as far as what kind of events can be held there, what times it is available, noise must be minimized, etc. She is opposed to any work that will damage even one tree. Parking alternatives such as shuttling need to be explored.

Ms. Bennett stated that her company's job will be to handle the operational responsibilities for Old Church. She understands there is no desire to have a party atmosphere there.

Mayor Eady closed the discussion regarding the parking recommendations. He stated that there will be additional opportunities for stakeholders to voice their concerns before any decisions are made. Work inside/on the church grounds still needs to be discussed. The conceptual issues he wants to address first are replacement of the deck and adding a warming kitchen to the cottage. These two items carry a higher price tag than some of the internal modifications proposed. The first question should be whether these two items should even be done.

Mike Ready stated that the committee determined the work on Old Church should be done in phases and that the interior work should be done first. The deck is unsafe and is a liability to the City. The committee has not reached a conclusion on what they would like to recommend for the cottage. Their request now is for the City Council to approve the interior work and replacement of the deck.

George Holt stated that a warming kitchen is not needed if the type of events will not change. He recommends doing the interior work first and seeing if activity increases before committing to spending the money for the phase two and three work.

Mayor Eady stated that the deck can be taken down to eliminate the liability issue. Laura McCanless agreed and also cautioned against damaging the new trees when the deck is demolished. She does not want to see anything done that would compromise the character of the building, such as removing the original locks on the front doors.

Ms. Bennett assured the City Council that no modifications will be made to the building without the City's approval.

The City Council will vote on contracting for the interior work and removal of the deck at the September regular session. The committee will finalize the event management contract for presentation to the City Council.

4. **Pedestrian Traffic Analysis for a Mid-Block Crossing to Asbury Street Park** (Appendix C)
Robert Renwick with Keck & Wood gave an update on this item. Keck & Wood managed the project for the replacement of the sidewalk on Emory Street, which originally included a mid-block crossing. The crossing was not approved by GDOT. A Traffic and Engineering study will be required for this work to be considered for approval by GDOT. Keck & Wood has submitted a proposal to complete the study.

Laura McCanless asked if GDOT would be more likely to approve a striped crosswalk without a rapid flash beacon signal without the need for a study. Mr. Renwick advised that for any crossing to be installed, a study must be completed.

Jim Windham stated he believes a mid-block crossing is not reasonable and is a waste of money. He does not think it will be used.

Ms. McCanless asked if a crosswalk was placed at an intersection, if a study is required. Mr. Renwick advised that there must be a four-way stop at the intersection for a study not to be required.

Mayor Eady expressed his belief that the City must provide a safe crossing to Asbury Street Park. He further stated he believes the City would be negligent not to install it. He favors pursuing the signal with the striped crossing. Jeff Wearing agreed.

Chief Anglin stated that the City is obtaining signs for East and West Soule Street notifying drivers that they are approaching a school zone. The signage is required in order for the Police Department to enforce the school zone speed. Mayor Eady would also like to see a "your speed" sign placed on Highway 81.

The consensus was to have the study done. Mayor Eady advised Mr. Renwick to move forward and that the City Council would vote to approve the task order at the September regular session.

5. **Task Order from AtkinsRealis for Preliminary Site Analysis for Old Church Parking** (Attachment D)
This issue was tabled.

6. Resolution to Amend the Fee Schedule for Planning, Development, Review and Inspection (Attachment E)

Laura McCanless recommended that the City implement the minimum requirements to comply with the new law and review the other fees at another time. Bill Andrew clarified that the resolution is to change the standard for charging from a per project cost to a square footage cost.

The consensus was to vote on the resolution *as is* at the September regular session. However, several of the City Council members want to review the fees in detail. Mayor Eady stated a committee will be appointed to review the fee structure with Bill Andrew and Bureau Veritas. The issue will also be discussed at the September work session.

7. Keck & Wood Proposal for Stormwater Improvements on Emory Street south of E. Wade Street (Attachment F)

GDOT cleaned out the pipe at the location, but the problem appeared again. A preliminary study showed that perhaps the pipe is not big enough. GDOT advised cleaning out the pipe is all they will do. They will not replace pipes. There is some evidence that the problem began when the sidewalk was installed. The work proposed is the least expensive of the options and would allow the sidewalk to support better drainage. Completion of this work does not preclude doing additional work in the future.

The consensus was to have the work done. Mayor Eady advised Mr. Renwick to move forward and that the City Council would vote to approve the proposal at the September regular session

8. Personal Transportation Vehicle Plan (Golf Cart Ordinance) for Oxford (Attachment G)

Tabled until September work session.

9. Discussion of Asbury Street Park Camera Upgrades (Attachment H)

Tabled until September work session.

10. Georgia Municipal Employees Benefit System (GMEBS) Retirement Plan Restatement (Attachment I)

Changes will be voted on at the September regular session.

11. Fanning Institute's Proposal for Community Discussions/Proposal on Next Steps for Removed Historical Signs (Attachment J)

Mayor Eady explained that the proposal is to have the Fanning Institute lead a facilitated discussion with a study group to determine how the City wants to share its history since the old signs have been removed.

Erik Oliver stated he does not think an outside group is needed, and he does not feel the issue is a high priority. He is interested in doing the things that were planned in the FY 2025 budget regarding the City's history.

Mayor Eady tabled the discussion and asked the City Councilmembers to give the issue some thought.

12. Annual Subscription for Supplemental Power (Attachment K)

The City is not able to get a low-cost deal on this year's purchase and must accept market rates. The City can choose to sign an agreement with the City of Marietta now to lock in a rate or to wait and see if the market price decreases. Mayor Eady's sense is that it will not go down, because demand is outpacing supply right now. His suggestion is to plan to sign the contract with the City of Marietta. MEAG will coordinate negotiation of the contract..

Jim Windham would like to evaluate alternatives to reduce the City's annual deficit.

13. Task Order from AtkinsRealis for Whatcoat Street (Attachment L)

The task order is to have AtkinsRealis engineers in the room to discuss changes to the plan. The task order does not include AtkinsRealis making any changes. This issue will be voted on at the September work session.

14. Other Business**15. Work Session Meeting Review****16. Executive Session**

None

17. Adjourn

Mayor Eady adjourned the meeting at 9:53 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer