



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2020 – 6:30 PM
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

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

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Pepper – City Manager
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Jody Reid – Utility Superintendent
Dave Harvey – Police Chief

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Ready, Laura Gafnea, Charlie Williams

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor's Announcements

Mayor Eady's comments all related to COVID-19 issues.

Mayor Eady expressed his appreciation to Barbara Cole, who has offered to make masks for the city staff.

Earlier on this date Mayor Eady forwarded information about President Trump's guidelines for reopening businesses, along with information from a press conference held by Governor Kemp. Governor Kemp has decided to allow hospitals to resume elective surgeries. He has also authorized the reopening of certain business on April 24th and April 27th, subject to restrictions/precautions. The shelter-in-place order will expire at 11:59 pm on April 30th. Governor Kemp has decreed that local governments cannot issue requirements that are more stringent than those he has issued. The only business impacted by the announcement is a hairdresser, which can open April 24th subject to the restrictions/precautions. Testing is available for symptomatic individuals. Those who believe they may have COVID-19 can contact the Gwinnett-Newton-Rockdale Health Department to get an appointment for a test.

Marcia Brooks asked if the Council is using the shelter-in-place date as a guideline for determining when the office can be reopened. Mayor Eady advised that his thought in talking with Matt is if the Governor does not extend the shelter-in-place order, to the extent we can maintain the safety of employees and people who come into City Hall, we can go back to City Hall being open. That is dependent on the ability of staff to maintain 6 feet of distance between each other, wear masks, wash hands frequently, wipe down surfaces frequently, and wait on customers only through safety glass.

The Public Works team has been able to continue basic functions such as cutting grass that do not require interacting with others and continuing other essential functions by practicing social distancing. Mayor Eady asked Jody Reid about his team's readiness to resume normal operations. Mr. Reid advised the leaf vacuum is currently not working, but he hopes to have it repaired by the end of the week. He plans to resume yard debris pickup with his team on April 21st.

2. **Emergency Declaration for the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)** (Attachment B)

So far at each stage, Governor Kemp has stated that cities cannot take actions more restrictive than the state's actions. If Governor Kemp does not extend the shelter-in-place requirements beyond April 30th, the Oxford City Council can implement restrictions beyond that date if it desires to. The Emergency Declaration the City of Oxford implemented expires today (April 20th). It was the consensus of the City Councilmembers to wait to see if the state would extend the shelter-in-place order beyond April 30th. If the Council feels it is needed, it can reconvene to take additional action.

3. **FY 2021 Operating and Capital Budgets** (Attachment C)

Mayor Eady discussed items that have been adjusted since the last discussion of the budget. George Holt asked that future revisions include a way to distinguish visually what has been changed from the previous version. Mayor Eady advised that some of the revenue projections may change as we learn more in the coming weeks about LOST and SPLOST revenue collections and other economic factors.

1. Property taxes – not changed from 2019 impact from current economic situation is delayed.
2. LOST – reduced by 20% from 2019 projection based on analysis of revenue reduction during last recession.
3. Police Department – fully staffed – personal services cost increased
4. Water/Sewer fund revenues – reduced to reflect worst-case scenario if Oxford College does not return to normal operations in the Fall.
5. Electric fund revenues – right now is the same as FY2020 budget. Projection comes from Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG). Worst-case scenario would probably be a loss of about \$335,000 for FY2021.
6. Electricity purchased – right now is the same as FY2020 budget. Will probably be less depending on how Oxford College impacts demand.

Bottom line, the City is able to maintain a positive balance for the FY2021 budget based on current knowledge, but that is subject to change before the FY2021 budget is passed.

Jeff Wearing observed that there may be an upswing in residential use due to the shelter-in-place order that could help to offset the reduced usage by Oxford College, the City's largest customer.

The Capital budget is a reformatting of the previous version with correction of a few errors. Mayor Eady stated that every year there is a large amount budgeted for Capital purchases, and every year, the amount spent is considerably less than what was budgeted. This is due to a variety of reasons including changing priorities, lack of capacity to execute projects, and lack of funding that was anticipated.

Among the projects listed for over \$3 million dollars, at least \$2.2 million of the projects can be delayed. He considers about \$1 million dollars of the listed projects as essential, which are water/sewer projects and sidewalk projects.

George Holt asked if the City is applying for a grant for the sidewalk project. Mayor Eady stated it is his plan to apply for a grant for this.

Mr. Holt feels that the City's main goal with the capital budget should be to spend for its needs, and not necessarily its wants. He feels that there are some things in the proposed capital budget, such as vehicles and equipment, that are wants.

Mayor Eady stated that the City has \$100,000 allocated in the 2017 SPLOST proceeds for police vehicles and radio upgrades. The budget includes one vehicle in FY2021 and one vehicle in FY2022. Mr. Holt asked if the computer upgrades for the Police Department would come from the SPLOST money. Mayor Eady advised they would not, they are included in the operating budget.

Laura McCanless stated she had done some research on miles typically driven on police cars before they are disposed of. Typically, that mileage is about 100,000. Based on her research, the City's cars are somewhat young to be replacing them, based on mileage. Mr. Holt stated that in the past the City had sold cars to other jurisdictions before the end of their useful life.

Mr. Holt's concern is with buying an additional car for a spare in a time of economic uncertainty. It has been stated that the Police Department currently uses their truck as a spare. When a car is purchased next year, the current one could then become a spare. Ms. McCanless agreed that the police cars do not have a lot of activity in miles, and she feels the purchase could wait.

Mayor Eady clarified that the SPLOST money can only be spent on designated uses, which are police cars and radio upgrades. Mr. Holt advised he understands that and does not want to take the cars away but is opposed to any vehicle purchases right now. Mayor Eady advised that the purchase is in next year's budget and would only be authorized when explicitly approved by the Council.

Lynn Bohanan expressed that the police vehicles need to be in good enough condition that any of them could actively engage in a pursuit if needed. The vehicles we have now may meet that requirement, but if one of them went bad, we should be able to limp along for a few weeks while the vehicle is being replaced.

Mr. Holt stated that he is not opposed to purchasing the police cars but does not want to purchase a new one that will just sit around. He wants the Police Department to get its money's worth out of the ones they have, and he believes they can use the truck to run radar.

Mayor Eady observed that there are two different issues being discussed. The vehicles listed in the Capital Budget are simply placeholders, which Council must approve before they can be purchased. They can be moved to other years if the Council wishes, but they are earmarked for purchase from SPLOST funds.

James Windham stated that Oxford's Police Department is one of the best equipped for its size, and it was the Council's intention to replace police vehicles every other year, not every year. He does not see any reason to spend \$50,000 for a vehicle.

Mayor Eady stated that the only thing being discussed is whether to include the possibility of replacing a police car in FY2021 and FY2022 if one needs to be replaced and using SPLOST funds to purchase the new vehicles. The Councilmembers were provided with information showing that police cars were purchased in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2016. It has been four (4) years since a police car has been purchased. If the Council feels that purchasing one next fiscal year is not appropriate, the purchases can be pushed out to future fiscal years.

Mr. Holt pointed out that based on the maintenance records of the four vehicles, they are all in good condition and have not had any work other than routine maintenance. He feels the planned purchases could be pushed out a year.

Mayor Eady advised that the price for the vehicles is based on what is available now. The cost per vehicle is going to be about \$46,000. Mayor Eady stated that he will not allow any vehicle purchases to be made without Council approval.

Ms. Bohanan asked if we push the purchases out to FY2022, then the need arises to purchase a new vehicle before then, could the budget be amended to make the needed purchase.

Jeff Wearing recommended leaving a vehicle in the budget for FY2021 and leaving the decision of when to purchase it to the discretion of the Mayor, City Manager and Police Chief. Mr. Windham stated that no purchase of \$10,000 or more can be made without approval of the Council.

Mr. Holt asked if the need arose could someone drive the truck home and leave their patrol car at Oxford for use by another officer. He stated some agencies operate this way with

their vehicles. Chief Harvey stated that there would be a lot of equipment to switch out. He also pointed out that the truck cannot be used to pursue or to make an arrest.

James Windham asked for the rules regarding pursuit/arrest in vehicles. He also asked about the use of the vehicles assigned to Public Works. He questioned how the City Manager's vehicle could be in fair condition with 123,000 miles and no major repairs.

Avis Williams stated that she has no problem with leaving the vehicle in the FY2021 budget. She appreciates and trusts the information provided and understands Chief Harvey's needs. She is a new Council member along with a couple of others, and she believes the City should move forward with fiscally responsible policies, regardless of how many has been spent in the past. She advised that the law enforcement agencies she is familiar with have assigned vehicles and do not swap out equipment in the same vehicle.

Ms. Bohanan stated that she is torn because she wants to ensure that the Police Department has what it needs, but she also understands the need to be fiscally conservative during this period of economic uncertainty.

Mayor Eady summed up his understanding of the discussion: the majority recommendation is to push the first car to FY2022 and switch to a replacement schedule of every other year, with the next purchase in FY2024. If anything occurs that dictates the need for a new police car prior to FY2022, the budget can be amended to allow purchase of a new vehicle.

Mayor Eady thanked Matt Pepper, Jody Reid and Dave Harvey for compiling the vehicle information in a very short period of time. The purpose of the vehicles will be added to the data. Mr. Holt commended Chief Harvey for doing a good job in his department and keeping good records. Mr. Windham also expressed his appreciation. Mayor Eady advised this information goes a long way toward establishing a replacement schedule for vehicles.

Mr. Holt asked why a lawnmower that just had its engine replaced last year is now being replaced. Mr. Windham suggested purchasing one lawnmower instead of two lawnmowers because the sustainability measures and changes to rights of way should reduce the need for mowing. Mayor Eady stated that one of the lawnmowers is intended for a new groundskeeper position.

Jody Reid advised that the life of a mower is about 2,000 hours, not only for the engine but for all parts of a mower. Lynn Bohanan asked if we could purchase one mower right now, and if needed amend the budget to allow purchase of a second one.

Mayor Eady pointed out that Jody's team can barely keep up with the mowing. One of the mowers is for another groundskeeper who has not yet been hired. Mr. Holt asked if there would be three people mowing once the groundskeeper is hired. Mayor Eady stated that is the case. Mr. Holt stated that originally, the new groundskeeper was added to take care of Asbury Park, but we now have a third-party contract for this. Ms. McCanless asked if we are looking toward revisiting a third-party contractor maintaining Asbury Park if we hire the

other groundskeeper. Mayor Eady stated we are not, and that a different level of expertise is needed to maintain the grounds of the park. The additional groundskeeper is needed to keep up with the workload of mowing the Public Works team has to do.

Mayor Eady asked if there is agreement in moving \$12,000 of the \$24,000 allocated for mowers in FY2021 to FY2022. It will not be spent unless it's needed, and it must be approved by Council before it's spent.

Avis Williams, Laura McCanless and Lynn Bohanan agreed with this approach. Jeff Wearing disagreed with this approach. He believes the money for both should be left in the FY2021 budget.

Mayor Eady advised the proposal is based on the expectation that only one mower will need to be replaced during the FY2021 budget year. If the other one has to be replaced, Mr. Pepper and Mr. Reid can bring the request to Council for approval.

Mr. Holt asked why a F-250 is needed for the Public Works Department. Mr. Reid advised it is used for water main repairs and electric repairs. They also have to haul an air compressor sometimes and it carries about 2,500 pounds of tools. The F150 has had its transmission replaced twice because it is overloaded.

Mr. Windham observed that a truck is not needed to read meters. Mr. Holt observed that if the City Manager's vehicle is replaced, the old vehicle could be used to read meters. He proposed an amendment to the Capital Budget to remove the truck from Public Works and transfer the City Manager's vehicle to Public Works when the replacement car is purchased.

Mr. Windham suggested having the Public Works Department try the City Manager's car for about a year.

Mayor Eady asked Jody to go back and evaluate whether he can manage his department with three trucks. Depending on his response, the Council may add funds for a good used truck to the budget. He asked everyone to review the budget and send any specific questions to him.

4. Moratorium on Non-Essential Spending

Mayor Eady stated there is no non-essential spending that will occur before the end of the fiscal year. Any significant expenditures in next year's budget must be approved by the City Council before purchases can be made. Therefore, he does not feel it is necessary to impose a non-essential spending moratorium. The City Councilmembers agreed with this approach.

5. Sanitation Services

Latham Home Sanitation has requested rate increases for weekly garbage and recycling pickup. They have been notified that any changes will take effect on the contract renewal

date of July 1. City Manager Matt Pepper contacted nearby cities to find out what they are paying for services, and provided that information to the Councilmembers.

Laura McCanless expressed surprise that Latham's rates are on the low end compared to other cities. She also mentioned that they sometimes leave garbage cans in the road. Avis Williams stated she has had issues a couple of times that Mr. Pepper helped her address. Jeff Wearing also stated he has had problems with them in the past. Mayor Eady stated he and Mr. Pepper would take these additional concerns about the quality of the service Latham Sanitation is providing. When issues are brought to their attention, they usually correct them, so the City will need to continue to monitor them for contract compliance.

6. **Whatcoat Street Improvements** (Attachment D)

The FY2020 Capital Budget includes \$300,000 to make improvements to Whatcoat Street. The improvements include installation of sidewalks and parking spaces along the street and realignment of the street where it ends at George Street to make it safer. Mayor Eady prepared several slides showing the current layout and the proposed future layout.

Lynn Bohanan indicated she has been approached by several residents who were concerned about the skating rink being eliminated. Jeff Wearing stated he had also mentioned that previously, but he believes destruction of the skating rink will be unavoidable to complete the job. He also believes a few trees along the path will need to be removed.

Laura McCanless asked about the integrity of the skating rink. The last time she was there she observed some degrading of the concrete. Mayor Eady agreed that if it remains it would probably need to be restored and that cost would need to be added to the project cost. The skating rink was installed by the Lions Club in the 1960s. It has limited use and mostly has sentimental value.

Lynn Bohanan asked if the sidewalk could go behind the memorial rather than in front of it to save a tree. Jeff Wearing stated that the sidewalk needs to go in front of the memorial so people utilizing the sidewalk will read it.

Mayor Eady stated the proposed project preserves most of the existing trees, and there are plans to plant additional trees. As the trees mature, the new area will look similar to the existing area.

George Holt asked if this project would duplicate the work that Oxford College did on the other side of the street. Mayor Eady stated that the drawing Robert Jordan prepared contemplates the same configuration as was previously installed by Oxford College.

Laura McCanless asked if the new parking spaces will be used by Oxford College because of its proximity to the Whatcoat building and Oxford Operations building. Mayor Eady stated that parking may overflow from those two areas, but one of the planned uses for the parking spaces is to accommodate larger crowds for events at Allen Memorial United Methodist Church.

James Windham expressed his concern about the sidewalk going to the Whatcoat building instead of joining the sidewalk on Emory Street. Mayor Eady stated the thought behind the proposed configuration was to wait until it is known what the long-term use of the Whatcoat building will be before extending it beyond that building. Mr. Windham stated he does not feel the sidewalk should service the Whatcoat building. Sidewalks have an environmental impact and should be used judiciously.

Ms. McCanless validated Mr. Windham's point, stating that there is hardly enough pedestrian traffic to support two sidewalks on this street. One sidewalk may be fine. The sidewalk going to the Whatcoat building could be held out for a later time. Mayor Eady observed that the proposed design takes the sidewalk around an existing concrete pad at the Whatcoat building. It could continue on toward Emory Street and eventually tie in with a sidewalk between George Street and Pierce Street.

Ms. Bohanan asked why this sidewalk is needed. Mr. Windham stated he advocated for the sidewalk originally because Whatcoat Street is the only part of the original planned City of Oxford that still exists. Making both sides of the street the same was intended to emphasize that Whatcoat Street was intentionally laid out diagonally. Ms. Bohanan stated that the students walk in Whatcoat Street rather than using the current sidewalk, so she does not see the need of installing an additional sidewalk they will not use.

Ms. McCanless asked if the proposed sidewalk could be deferred while completing the rest of the project. Deferring the sidewalk construction would give the City more time to understand what the long-term use of the Whatcoat building will be.

Mayor Eady asked if the Councilmembers are comfortable with completing the road improvements to eliminate the ambiguity with the current intersections of Whatcoat Street and George Street with Emory Street.

Jeff Wearing asked if the price for a sidewalk could be obtained for future planning. Ms. Bohanan felt that a price obtained now would not be relevant for when we actually plan to do it. Mr. Windham suggested a brick decorative area like the existing one on the other side rather than a sidewalk.

Mayor Eady stated there does not seem to be consensus on how and when to move forward on the sidewalk so the City will move forward on the road construction part of the proposed project at this time and defer the sidewalk discussion to the future.

7. **City Welcome Sign Project** (Attachment E)

The FY2020 Capital Budget includes \$60,000 to construct a welcome sign and make improvements to the city-owned lot located at 6153 Emory Street. This item was tabled from the April 1st Regular Session meeting. Mayor Eady presented some photos of the Wentworth subdivision sign for comparison. Although the dimensions for the proposed sign are not quite the same, the proposed concept is similar.

Laura McCanless stated the Wentworth sign appears small traveling from one direction but larger from the other direction. She also observed that she feels there is too much space around the sign on the front panel of the Wentworth structure. Jeff Wearing suggested extending the side panels to 120 inches. Ms. McCanless and Lynn Bohanan stated the sign as depicted on the drawing needs to be rotated because it faces Geiger Street, which makes it less visible from Emory Street. Mr. Wearing and Mayor Eady also stated the sign should be placed further back on the property than depicted on the drawing.

Ms. McCanless suggested building a mockup that could help determine what the actual placement should be. She also recommended holding off on this project because of the expense involved and the need to ensure it is constructed as desired. James Windham asked that instead of a mockup, perhaps a sample design could be imposed on a picture of the property, which would be less expensive than a mockup. Mayor Eady asked Ms. McCanless if Forrest McCanless could do a CAD drawing, which she will check into. Ms. Bohanan also stated she has some experience with photo manipulation programs. Mr. Windham provided the names of some open-source programs she might can try. Mayor Eady stated the Council and staff will continue to work on this project.

8. **Electric System Improvements** (Attachment F)

The FY2020 Capital Budget includes \$120,000 for a project to replace equipment, wires, and switches along W. Richardson Street and Moore Street. This will include replacing some of the poles with rotten tops. City staff has obtained bids from two vendors to perform the work, and the City would provide materials. Staff recommends granting the contract for this work to Marable-Pirkle, Inc., the low bidder.

James Windham asked for clarification about the statement in the Marable-Pirkle bid “rock and/or hand digging to be addressed on an hourly bases [sic]” compared to the statement further down that the bid is a firm price. Jody Reid stated that is their rock clause, and it is included in all their bid proposals. Mr. Windham stated he would like for that statement to be clearer.

George Holt expressed concern about the Marable-Pirkle bid providing very little information compared to the other bid, which provides an itemized list of what the company is bidding on. Mr. Windham stated their bids need to state what they are bidding for. Jody Reid stated they were provided drawings which they bid on. Mr. Windham stated bids need to reference the drawings. Laura McCanless asked for an amended bid for the vote that references the drawings. George Holt, Lynn Bohanan, and Mr. Windham agreed with Ms. McCanless. Mayor Eady pointed out that the Marable-Pirkle bid does refer to the drawings for part of the work. The punctuation in their statement needs to be modified to include that all the proposed work is based on the drawings.

Mr. Windham asked that in the future, all such bids should include the relevant drawings when presented to the Council.

9. Bidirectional Metering Charge (added to agenda)

Laura McCanless stated she was approached by a resident who was concerned because he was told at City Hall that there is a blind charge of \$2.50 added to the utility bills of all solar customers. Mayor Eady stated that there is a rider in the template provided by ECG that the City adopted in 2015 for a monthly charge on bidirectional meters of \$2.50 per month. Mayor Eady has not been able to determine the purpose for the charge. It is also troubling that it is not being shown on the bill.

Ms. McCanless proposed elimination of the charge from customer bills. The loss of revenue would be minimal. James Windham agreed with Ms. McCanless and proposed that this item be placed on the May Council Meeting agenda for a vote.

Lynn Bohanan agreed, and also stated customers may want to know if they can get a refund. Ms. McCanless stated this would be a change in policy, so a refund might not be justified, except for the fact that the charge has not been showing on the bills.

Marcia Brooks stated it should not be a problem to calculate the amount the affected customers are owed and eliminating the fee will actually save time for her staff, because they currently spend a couple of hours each month recalculating the utility bills for these customers.

George Holt recommended that April's utility bills not include the charge. Ms. Brooks verified that staff could take care of that and will work on the method for reimbursement of the past charges. The Council will vote to make the decision official at the May Council Meeting.

Mayor Eady adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer