



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, APRIL 19, 2021 – 6:30 PM
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

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

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Ready, Cheryl Ready, Melissa Hage, Barbara Cole, Michael McQuaide

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor's Announcements

Mayor Eady asked for input from the City Council on their opinion about meeting in person for City Council meetings. All Councilmembers except George Holt advised that they are comfortable with meeting in person. Mayor Eady would like to continue to make the meeting available online to those who would not want to attend in person. Marcia Brooks advised that she and Matt Pepper are working on logistics necessary to broadcast in-person meeting via Zoom. Mayor Eady stated he would like to try meeting in person for the May Regular Session on May 3, 2021.

James Windham recommended doing temperature checks of all attendees for in-person meetings. Laura McCanless stated all attendees will also need to wear masks correctly. Mr. Windham asked if Councilmembers could join the meeting via Zoom.

Mayor Eady advised he would discuss the logistics with Marcia Brooks and Matt Pepper to ensure that the Councilmembers can be heard and can hear what is said in the room. For the May Regular Session, he may do a trial run with only him, Mr. Pepper and Ms. Brooks in the room. At a minimum, the City will abide by the CDC guidelines in effect at the time of the meeting but may also have additional precautions in place.

2. Committee Reports

- a. Trees Parks and Recreation (TPR) Board – Cheryl Ready stated that a lot of trees have been pruned recently. The Board is working diligently on kickstarting their Emory Street Revitalization Program. The Board also has a vacancy and asked for suggesters for members. Mayor Eady stated he has a potential member and will talk to Ms. Ready privately. Jeff Wearing advised that work on the George Street Park fence has been delayed due to difficulties in obtaining the materials. He hopes to be able to work on the fence around the weekend of May 1.
- b. Sustainability Committee – Melissa Hage reported that the Committee has been having productive meetings and chats with John Devine concerning how they can help him work on the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP) grant application for the restoration of Dried Indian Creek. Some of the Committee members were able to go to a restoration project on the South River and talk with some individuals working on restoration projects in the past week to obtain data to use on the Dried Indian Creek project. The Committee plans to hire a non-paid student intern for the summer to begin researching information needed for the City of Oxford sustainability plan. They plan to work on this plan in the Fall after the grant application is submitted.

Mayor Eady advised that Mike McQuaide is working to arrange another stream tour with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Mr. McQuaide stated that they asked for May 22, 2021, and that Daniel Parsons offered the Oxford Farm as the staging area. Mayor Eady invited Councilmembers to participate and advised that COVID-19 precautions will be observed.

- c. Committee on Race – Avis Williams reported that the Committee has a meeting scheduled for the second week in May. They will be discussing plans for the Juneteenth celebration, which will be held on June 19, 2021 and will be virtual. By next month's work session, she hopes to have specific information to provide, and the event announcement will be distributed on the City's social media platforms.
- d. Planning Commission – Matt Pepper stated that the Planning Commission is finalizing their recommendations for amendments to Chapter 40 of the City of Oxford zoning ordinance.
- e. Downtown Development Authority (DDA) – Mike Ready stated that the Authority has been working on a recommendation for the farmers market on the greenspace area.

3. Downtown Development Authority Greenspace Proposal (Attachment B)

Mike Ready presented the recommendations by the DDA for the farmers market on the City's greenspace area. The sitting area has been moved away from Yarbrough House and under the trees. He presented two possible fencing types for fencing along the edges of the green, and an example of a hanging sign. These plans do not include paving the parking area. However, due to the anticipated increase in traffic some gravel may be

needed for erosion control at the lip of Highway 81 going onto the property. Mr. Ready expects that the Spring Festival scheduled for April 29 and 30 and May 1 will help them understand more about the traffic flow.

Discussion about the two types of fencing included difference in cost and consistency in fencing throughout the City in the parks. Mr. Ready advised the DDA favors the cedar crossbuck style, but that style would be more expensive than the rustic split rail style. Some Councilmembers favored uniformity of fencing in all parks, while others favored varying tones for fencing according to the purpose of each park/area.

Jeff Wearing expressed concern about spending a lot on the fencing since it is intended to be a temporary solution for the green space. He also pointed out that the crossbuck fencing is more expensive and would require much more maintenance than the split rail fencing. He would select the split-rail fencing because of these factors and because it is consistent with the fences already installed in the City.

James Windham asked what the purpose is of blocking two of the curb cuts on Highway 81. Mr. Ready stated the thought was to prohibit turns from and to Highway 81 and to also control access to the green for the vendors. There was also a question concerning access to line maintenance by the City, and their vision is a gate for that purpose.

Mr. Windham was concerned about the ground becoming ruddy if all traffic is routed through one section. People will drive to get as close to the post office as possible. Mr. Ready stated that the DDA and the City have discussed these factors and are trying to resolve these issues. He expects that the Farmers Market Spring Festival and Lions Club Yard Sale April 29-May 1 will give them a good idea of how things should work. Mr. Ready believes there may be some drainage issues an engineer should probably look at.

Mr. Windham also recommended having consistency in signage for Oxford. The parks should all have uniform signs along with the sign for the green, creating an identity for the City of Oxford.

Lynn Bohanan asked where the parking is on the map. Marcia Brooks advised it is the same parking area that is currently used for court. Laura McCanless stated that the map shows corner turns of the fence in the parking area to define the limitations of parking. Ms. Bohanan stated it might be better to stop the parking area along the line of the front of Yarbrough House to make a definite distinction between the parking area and the market area. Ms. McCanless stated the DDA also discussed putting fencing only at the parking area and having some sort of notional border along the other areas.

Mr. Windham was concerned about throttling customers to parking on one end of the green and walking all the way to the other end. He thought this may negatively impact business for vendors.

Mayor Eady stated that when he looked at planning for this space in the past with others, they considered laying out a parking area along the back side of the property with a one-way traffic flow. Ms. McCanless stated a gravel drive may cause dust to be stirred up.

Ms. Bohanan mentioned that people parking along the fence may cause damage to the fence with their vehicles.

Mayor Eady asked the Councilmembers to send questions to him, Matt Pepper, Mike Ready, or Laura McCanless. He suggested to Mr. Ready that some price information on the types of fences may be helpful.

Mr. Windham asked if anyone on the DDA had spoken with the vendors. Mr. Ready advised they had not.

George Holt feels that spending money on fencing is unnecessary since it will be temporary. Mayor Eady stated that the DDA is trying to make the green look more like an area designated for a specific use until something permanent can be placed there.

4. **FY2022 Operating and Capital Budgets** (Attachment C)

Matt Pepper made a presentation concerning the proposed Operating and Capital budgets for Fiscal Year 2022. Laura McCanless and George Holt advised they would contact Matt about questions they have.

5. **Yarbrough House Discussion**

The Oxford City Council has had extensive discussions in the past concerning future plans for the Yarbrough House (107 W. Clark Street). Mayor Eady included the issue on the agenda so that discussions could begin again. The house will continue to deteriorate if no action is taken on it.

Previously the City Council discussed making minimal repairs to make the facility safe and functional, or possibly making additional cosmetic updates and adding ADA accessible bathrooms to make it ready to lease as a commercial venue. Another option to consider is moving the house to a different location since it is not particularly an asset in its current location. The City-owned property at the corner of Asbury Street and Fletcher Street behind City Hall. The house does not have the historical significance once thought. It cannot have been where Bishop Haygood stayed as a student since the house was not built when he was a student. Mayor Eady asked the Councilmembers for their current thoughts.

Laura McCanless was opposed to moving the house due to the complexity and cost involved. She also pointed out that the location it would be moved to is strictly residential, and it would be an inconsistent use to use it as a commercial property. She believes that the building has marketable charm in its current location.

Mayor Eady added that an additional option would be to tear down the house. He does not advocate for this or any other option. He just wanted to put all the issues on the table that had previously been discussed.

Lynn Bohanan agreed with Ms. McCanless' position. She gave an additional option to sell the house with the condition that it must be moved, or even offer it at no cost to be moved. She cautioned against sinking more money into the property.

Avis Williams indicated she is not opposed to selling it but asked if anyone had ever approached the City about buying or leasing it. Mayor Eady stated the City Council has not ever discussed selling the house where it is because the City does not want to give up the property. He also advised that there had been no aggressive attempts to market the space commercially.

George Holt stated that the City had never had a concrete plan for what the property would be used for. He does not feel that any more money should be spent on it until the City knows what it wants to do with it. He feels the City is in too deep now financially, and some consider it an eyesore.

Mayor Eady stated that Melvin Baker's committee had suggested that it be turned into a history center/museum/visitor center. He asked Mr. Holt's thoughts on this proposal. Mr. Holt indicated he would be amenable to this proposal if that is what the Council decides it wants to do.

James Windham reiterated his past comments of the value of the property being the land, and the ability of the City Council to control it. He agrees with Ms. Bohanan's suggestion.

Jeff Wearing stated his belief that the house has some potential to bring people into the City. He and Mr. Windham had a vision of opening the back and planting a garden and creating space for people to relax, and possibly having some type of commercial enterprise such as a coffee shop. Moving the house at the City's expense is not an option in his opinion. He is not sure if a commercial enterprise is feasible. He agrees with Mr. Windham that the land is more valuable than the house, but he does believe the house has some historical value to the town. Atticus Haygood did live there for a time.

All things considered; he believes the DDA has more options to do something with it than the City Council does. He has had people call him and ask what is going to be done with it. He agrees with Mr. Holt that the City Council needs to decide on what to do with it. He thinks using it as part of the Town Center is a viable solution.

Ms. McCanless asked if the DDA has ever brainstormed ideas for Yarbrough House. Mayor Eady advised that they have never been formally asked by the Council to make a recommendation for the property. Ms. McCanless asked if it would be worth asking the DDA if they have any ideas. Mayor Eady stated that it would be great if they have any specific ideas if they have someone interested in doing something with it. There is nothing to preclude them from discussing it. The City owns the property, but this would be within

their purview to discuss. Ms. McCanless advised she will bring it up at the next DDA meeting.

Mr. Holt stated he does not want to pay for another study. Ms. McCanless agreed.

6. **City Cemetery Contract Update**

Lynn Bohanan, James Windham and Matt Pepper met with the Oxford Historical Cemetery Foundation, Inc. on April 2, 2021 on behalf of the City of Oxford. They expressed their concerns to the Foundation concerning the state of maintenance of the cemetery. All were in agreement with speaking with the current contractor to determine how to resolve the concerns and the complaints the City has been receiving. Ms. Bohanan is waiting to hear back from Anderson Wright and John Burson on the outcome of that discussion.

Ms. Bohanan advised the Foundation did not seem concerned about the contract between the Foundation and the City expiring on April 20, 2021. The Foundation believed that maintenance would continue beyond that date even if a new contract is not finalized by then.

A few changes to the contract were discussed. The City wants to remove power washing from the contract because it could further degrade inscriptions on the stone. There has been some recent discussion about having the stones reinscribed, but this is not recommended because it could cause more damage to stones as well. There was a concern about removal of piles of leaves as far as whose responsibility this is. Mr. Windham and Ms. Bohanan both recommended that plaques be installed to document the inscriptions that are difficult to read.

Mr. Windham added that power washing and re-inscriptions could both lead to lawsuits if damage is done as a result because the older plots are fee simple private property.

Ms. Bohanan stated that the City representatives made it clear to the Foundation representatives that the City would have the final say in decisions made.

Mayor Eady stated that Erik Oliver is working with a Boy Scout doing his Eagle Scout project. He is trying to capture some of the engravings on the headstones. He asked Ms. Bohanan to speak with Mr. Oliver to ensure that the City obtains a copy of any inscriptions the Boy Scout captures.

George Holt asked how fee simple plots are distinguished from burial rights plots. Mr. Windham advised that the City Council changed several years ago from selling fee simple lots, which are privately owned, to burial rights. Originally it was intended that the plot owners would maintain the plots.

Mayor Eady advised that some plots were sold as perpetual care plots, and some were not. Over time, the City Council decided to take responsibility for all maintenance. Pursuant to the current agreement with the Foundation, they are responsible for executing maintenance in the cemetery. The Foundation was created to accept donations for perpetual care.

Marcia Brooks advised she had done some research on this and would pull her notes together and send them to the City Council.

7. **Little Library**

Mayor Eady stated that during the last City Council meeting Barbara Cole suggested installing a second Little Library at Asbury Street Park because the one there is so popular. He advised that the Trees, Parks and Recreation (TPR) Board should be involved in the design and placement of another Little Library.

Her recommendation is to place children's books in the existing one and place adult books in the new one. With the City Council's approval, she and Nick Cole would like to make the new one in the shape of a schoolhouse to have some consistency in theme since the existing one is in the shape of a school bus.

All Councilmembers were in favor of the idea. Mayor Eady's thought is that it would be located near the other one under the pavilion. He asked Matt Pepper to add this topic to the agenda for the next TPR meeting. He also expressed appreciation to Barbara and Nick Cole for their willingness to build another one.

Ms. Cole stated that she and Mr. Cole ride their bikes to the park and check the existing one five to six times a week. They go through the books and remove any that have inappropriate subject matter such as religious topics.

8. **Longstreet Circle Paving Project** (Attachment D)

Matt Pepper advised that bids were opened on April 7, 2021 for the Longstreet Circle Paving Project. Eight bids were received, and the lowest bid was from Garrett Paving Company for \$181,524.40. Staff recommends rewarding the contract for this work to Garrett Paving Company.

There were no questions or comments from Councilmembers. A vote will be taken on the recommendation in the May Regular Session meeting.

9. **Electric System Improvements**

Matt Pepper stated that each year Jody Reid works with an electrical engineer at the Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG) to work on a specific section of the electrical system that needs to be improved. They draw up plans and share the plans with the City, then the City obtains bids from potential line companies to perform the work. Bids were received this year from Marable Pirkle, Inc. and Over and Under Contractors, Inc. Staff recommends awarding the contract to the lowest bidder, Marable Pirkle, Inc. for \$79,200. Mr. Reid is in the process of getting prices for supplies and materials which are provided by the City of Oxford. Obtaining these prices has been a challenge due to suppliers having difficulty obtaining their products.

Laura McCanless asked what is meant by the reference to digging on an hourly basis in the Marable Pirkle, Inc. bid. She wanted clarification on what is paid on an hourly basis. Mr.

Reid advised that both vendors would do this, and it is put into these contracts to account for any unanticipated complications encountered during digging. Some digging must be done by hand when this occurs.

Mayor Eady advised the City Council will vote on the recommendation of staff at the May Regular Session meeting.

Marcia Brooks advised that she sent information to the Councilmembers regarding a maintenance contract for the Police Department for the multifunction copier in City Hall which is being replaced. She asked if there were any concerns about moving forward with the plan to repurpose this copier for the Police Department at a maintenance cost of \$516 per year. No concerns were raised.

George Holt stated that he believes it is time to give employees a raise. He asked Matt Pepper if money is available in the budget for this purpose. Mr. Pepper stated he is exploring the option of a COLA for employees of about 2.5%. Mr. Holt stated he feels it is important to invest in the City's employees. James Windham and Avis Williams agreed. Mr. Windham expressed frustration about losing employees to nearby cities and counties due to salary.

Mayor Eady asked Mr. Pepper to add this topic and the Employee Handbook to the May Work Session meeting agenda.

10. Work Session Meeting Review

11. Executive Session

Real estate matters were discussed.

12. Adjourn

Mayor Eady adjourned the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer