



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 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

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Pepper – City Manager
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Dave Harvey – Police Chief

ELECTED OFFICIALS NOT PRESENT:

Laura McCanless – Councilmember

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Ready, Cheryl Ready, Michael McQuaide, Brian Barnard, Steve Longcrier

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor's Announcements

Mayor Eady stated that the City staff has been fortunate not to be impacted much by COVID-19. There is an employee out now that has contracted the virus, but this is only the second positive exposure since the pandemic started.

2. Committee Reports

- a. Trees Parks and Recreation (TPR) Board – Cheryl Ready stated that the next meet of the board is February 16, 2021. Councilmember Jeff Wearing will be in attendance to discuss his findings on the split-rail fence at George Street Park. They will also be discussing the budget at this meeting. They will also be replacing the ginkgo tree at Asbury Street Park on Monday, February 22, 2021. Ms. Ready advised that a science professor at Emory University is going to plant the seedlings in their greenhouse that were for this year's Arbor Day celebration that was cancelled, and they will be available for next year's celebration.

James Windham asked what they plan to do with the ginkgo trees being replaced. Ms. Ready advised she does not have that information but hopes they will be replanted or given to someone to replant. She advised that Beryl Budd has information on the bid that was chosen, which details what will be done with the trees removed.

- b. 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. He believes they will be ready to share them with the Mayor and City Council for their consideration in March of 2021.
- c. Downtown Development Authority (DDA) – Brian Barnard reported that the group has been working on some recommendations for the City of Oxford greenspace. They will present their recommendations at this meeting under a separate agenda topic.
- d. Sustainability Committee – Michael McQuaide reported that the Committee is still active. They participated recently in a conversation with John Divine facilitated by Matt Pepper and Mayor Eady. They have also been invited to join with the Yellow River Alliance so the Alliance can show them a section of the river that has already been reclaimed.

He stated that most of the committee has walked the Dried Indian Creek corridor from its headwaters to I-20, and they now have a good understanding of the threats to the corridor's health. They discovered that someone has been driving an ATV along the banks and back up around to the back of Oxford Farm. They would like to engage the City Council, the City Attorney and Chief Harvey about trying to discourage this behavior. At their next meeting they plan to evaluate their progress on the grant request and divide the remaining labor to ensure that the request is submitted on time.

Mayor Eady added that he and Matt spoke with Mayor Steve Horton of Covington on February 11, 2021. The mayor and his staff are very interested in protecting the creek and utilizing it for activity. Mayor Horton directed his team to put together a presentation for their City Council on what the City of Oxford is planning, as an invitation either to join the City of Oxford on the initial grant application or to endorse the application and join in a later phase. They also mentioned some possible funding from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) that has to do with water quality.

On Monday, February 22, 2021, the City of Oxford will kick off its project with the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC). They are going to develop a Streets and Trails plan that will show how the Dried Indian Creek project will tie in with a broader plan. John Calabria with the University of Georgia (UGA) is getting ready to kick off the watershed assessment and restoration plan for the project.

- e. Committee on Race – Avis Williams reported that the Committee has a meeting on February 16, 2021 to finalize plan for their first Black History Month Even on February 28, 2021 at 3:00 p.m. The program includes music, spoken word, students doing readings, and members of the community. The information will be on the City's website and on Facebook.

Mayor Eady asked all Councilmembers to follow the City's Facebook page and to share information when it is placed there to help get news out.

3. **Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Greenspace Proposal** (Attachment B)
Brian Barnard stated that the DDA has compiled a very high-level aerial drawing of their recommendations for the City of Oxford greenspace. Matt Pepper also provided a memo to the City Council explaining the recommendations. Until a determination is made of who would facilitate the implementation of the changes, they will not recommend any specifics for styles, imagery, signs, etc. The drawing shows that they are suggesting installing some type of decorative fencing showing the area is for a designated use and making it more attractive.

Behind the Yarbrough House a couple of picnic tables are shown to suggest an area that gives a sense of place to the downtown area. The goals of these suggested changes are to enhance the appeal of the area as a farmer's market and entice more participants and more visitors.

Mayor Eady asked if the DDA has an adequate amount in their budget to make the improvements suggested. Mr. Barnard stated that there is adequate funding in their budget, but one of the points of their discussion was that the DDA does not own the land, the City of Oxford does. The question arose as to whether the City of Oxford wishes to implement the changes based on their suggestions, or if they want the DDA to make the changes, and if the DDA makes the changes, should the discussion of land acquisition by the DDA be part of the discussion or will the City of Oxford retain ownership of the land.

Mr. Barnard explained the details of the drawing. The yellow area suggests a parking lot, material to be determined. This space would also be an indicator to vendors that they should enter and exit from West Clark Street rather than from Emory Street. The pink lines designate some sort of decorative fencing and signing on the two opposite corners of Emory Street. Behind Yarbrough House they are suggesting adding some picnic tables and trash receptacles with light landscaping in a shaded area.

James Windham asked if they plan to put any type of surface on the parking area. Mr. Barnard stated they have not specifically identified any material. This decision would be dependent on which group implements the plan.

Mr. Windham suggested focusing the picnic tables more toward the U.S. Post Office. This is where the citizens gather. He had concerns about compromising the beauty of the area behind Yarbrough House.

Mayor Eady asked if the City Council supports making minimal investments in the space to formalize the purpose of the space as a City farmer's market. He knows the City Council would want the parking lot to be some kind of porous material. He also asked if the City Council would want to maintain ownership and control over the area and execute the improvements, or would it want to turn ownership over to the DDA and have them execute the changes utilizing the funds they have been allocated by the City Council.

George Holt stated he believes the City Council should maintain control over the area. Mr. Windham, Jeff Wearing, and Avis Williams agreed.

Michael McQuaide stated that there are a number of people who would be reluctant to see the City of Oxford give up the land. One way to accomplish the goal of improving the space may be for the City of Oxford to pay for the improvements.

Mr. Windham stated that he has been critical in the past of the DDA because the City deeded them some land and gave them some money. What they planned to do did not work out well and was not received well by the citizenry. He would like to hear what other proposals they have for the area that has already been deeded to them. He also has a vision for the area behind the Yarbrough House, and he is concerned picnic tables would be a detrimental change to that part of the greenspace. He believes a better location for them is closer to the U.S. Post Office. He provided an article to Matt Pepper that has some interesting ideas for these types of areas. Other than the placement of the picnic tables, he does not see anything wrong with the depiction of the proposed suggestions.

Mr. Holt stated he agreed with Mr. Windham about the placement of the picnic tables.

City Clerk Marcia Brooks stated she is concerned that the proximity of the picnic tables to the Yarbrough House may introduce a liability issue. People would naturally migrate toward the house and may get on the porch, which is not in good repair. Mr. Windham acknowledged this is a valid point.

Mr. McQuaide stated the picnic tables on the drawing are much closer than where they were discussed by the group. They would be further back toward the Post Office. The thought was to provide some shade for farmer's market patrons.

Jeff Wearing stated that any work done to this area should be a springboard for future development with the goal of attracting more people to the downtown area. Anything done on the property should be sustainable but not permanent. He does not object to the picnic tables and supports moving them back. People coming to the farmers market need a place to sit. Picnic tables are a good way to make such a place available without making permanent changes to the space. However, he would like to see more from the DDA before approving any changes.

Mayor Eady thanked the DDA for its suggestions and stated it is a good prompt for the City to move forward with some type of action on the space to make it more attractive for visitors to the farmers market.

4. **FY 2022 Budget Calendar** (Attachment C)

Matt Pepper presented the budget calendar for FY2022. The Department Heads have submitted their requests for the FY2022 budget. In the coming months the Council will be discussing the operating and capital requests during the monthly work sessions. Adoption of the budget is scheduled for the June 7, 2021 regular Council meeting. The Property Tax Digest is received after the budget is adopted, so discussions on the millage rate cannot occur until July and August.

Mayor Eady stated his intention is to make the budget process as open and transparent as possible by discussing the budget in full Council meetings rather than setting up a separate committee to discuss the budget and recommend a final proposal. The operating budget is based partly on the needs of the staff but also on economic projections. The outlook is a bit more optimistic than it was last year. The capital budget is planned out five years in advance. Most of the capital budget for FY2022 will include items that were previously deferred. He encouraged the City Councilmembers to provide their input on the budget to him and Matt Pepper.

5. **City Hall Multifunction Copier** (Attachment D)

City Clerk Marcia Brooks presented a proposal to enter into a lease agreement with Novatech, the City's current provider for its multifunction copier (MFC). The maintenance costs for the MFC in City Hall have increased over time since the equipment was purchased in 2012. The city currently pays for an annual maintenance plan and a fee per colored sheet of paper. The cost per colored sheet has increased over the years, as well as the maintenance plan annual cost. A 60-month lease would cost about \$100 more annually than the cost to maintain and use the current equipment for the first three years. There are also two other options for terms of 24 months and 39 months. With a 60-month lease, the cost can be locked in for the first three years.

George Holt asked if the staff could review why so many copies are being made. Ms. Brooks stated that one thing the City can do is change the settings on all equipment to default printing in black and white. He asked if the staff could be more cognizant of what they are copying and try to cut down on unnecessary copying.

Avis Williams and James Windham agreed with doing a study to evaluate what is being printed. Mr. Windham mentioned that the City might consider desk scanners as a way to reduce printing. The City is also paying for cloud storage with OneDrive and SharePoint, and he would like for the City to make more use of these media. He does not believe an agreement should be longer than five years because technology changes so fast and equipment becomes obsolete.

Jeff Wearing expressed that he does not care for leases in general. He also noted that the biggest jump he sees in cost is in the fifth year, so he is in agreement that we should not wait much longer than five years to replace equipment. He is in favor of replacing the equipment but suggested that there might should be an approval process for printing certain items in color.

Mr. Windham added that he is not opposed to replacing the equipment but mentioned that over the last year the meetings have been conducted online and no paper has been printed. He stated that when the City returns to in-person meetings, there is no need to print any paper for the Councilmembers. He also asked that the staff expand on this change and try to find other ways to cut back on excess printing.

Ms. Brooks advised she would do some further evaluation and bring a final recommendation back to the City Council.

6. **Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails Signage**

Mayor Eady introduced Steven Longcrier of Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails and advised that in 2016, the City Council approved the installation of signs that would have been provided by his organization. There are three new City Councilmembers since this decision was made. Mayor Eady would like for the City Council to validate that this is still what it wants to do and address the sign that has already been placed across from Old Church. Mayor Eady asked Mr. Longcrier to provide some background information.

Mr. Longcrier stated he was in a previous meeting that included discussions of how to honor veterans on Memorial Day, July 4th, etc. He suggested that the City Council consider honoring the three signers from Georgia of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th.

He stated that his organization is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to history and education. He acknowledged that Oxford is unique in that it has no retail presence, is mostly residential, and has much history. He mentioned several well-known officials who have been or are currently on their board. They work with a variety of communities from large to small. They are trying to touch all bases to tell the story of what occurred in Georgia during the middle of the 19th century. They tell more than just battle stories. They tell the stories of civilians from all walks of life.

A large part of their funding comes from government agencies such as Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) but these grants require community participation. They worked with Newton County Historical Society and the Oxford Historical Society. A proposal was put together for and approved by the Newton County Commissioners. They paid \$5,000 toward having markers put on the square in Covington and at Old Church in Oxford. The remainder of the money came from fundraising, out of their own pockets, and from other sources, but none from the City of Oxford.

They wanted the people of Oxford to tell Oxford's story. They worked with Erik Oliver, Jim Waterston, and a number of other groups and individuals that provided information including Georgia Department of Natural Resources Historic Sites Division, several college professors, and Michael Thurmond who is an accomplished historian to come up with the correct wording. They want to work more closely with the African American community, and if the marker at Old Church needs to be revised, they want to make the changes needed to make it accurate.

The proposal originally brought before the City Council included the marker at Old Church plus three additional signs that would take people along the trail. Mayor Roseberry and Bob Schwartz requested that the signs be reduced in size from those originally proposed. Mr. Longcrier agreed with this request due to the uniqueness of Oxford. The signs proposed in 2016 were about half the size of the original ones, and Mayor Roseberry asked that they be double-sided. He also asked that they be designed to hang on cantilever posts rather than standard DOT signs.

The Oxford City Council voted in December 2016 by a 6 to 1 majority to approve the signs. GDOT had them on a very aggressive schedule to install markers and signs throughout the State of Georgia, so it was about two and one half (2½) years before the signs were manufactured. They were delivered about one and one half (1½) years ago and Mr. Longcrier assumes that Jody Reid has them stored. The signs cannot be used anywhere else. They cost an additional \$1,095.00.

Avis Williams thanked Mr. Longcrier for meeting with her recently. She asked if the City Council votes again and changes its vote, does that action set a bad precedent that paints the City Council in a negative way. She also wanted to know why the signs were not put up.

George Holt stated that he thinks the City Council had some second thoughts decided that perhaps the sign at Old Church was adequate. However, he stated that this is a new Council, and a sitting Council cannot bind a future Council to decisions.

James Windham agreed with Mr. Holt's statements. He stated that he was on the City Council when the vote was taken in 2016. Since that time his thoughts and feelings have evolved tremendously on this issue since that time. He has a problem with it being a Civil War heritage trail. The City of Oxford is trying very hard to do what's right by all of its citizens, recognizing who was responsible for building Emory University and trying to correct wrongs that have previously been done. He feels that proceeding with this project now would send the wrong message from the City Council.

Mr. Holt stated he has also changed his mind since the vote and agrees with Mr. Windham.

Mr. Windham asked that the Committee on Race review the proposal and the current sign and provide their recommendations.

Mayor Eady expressed appreciation to Mr. Longcrier for the willingness to make changes to the existing sign if needed. He wanted to make clear that he did not bring this issue back to the City Council because his was the lone dissenting vote in 2016. He feels that there is elevated awareness and sensitivity to things that have not been considered in the past. He wants the City Council to look at this issue through the lens of 2021 and not 2014-2016. If the Council wishes to move forward, that is what will happen. If the City Council chooses not to move forward, he would recommend reimbursing the organization for the cost.

Lynn Bohanan expressed agreement with the statements that had been made by the other City Councilmembers.

Jeff Wearing stated that people learn from history. We have to take it for what it is and forgive and forget. But one cannot hide from what has happened. It is not all good but it happened, and he disagrees with some of the feelings that have been expressed.

Mr. Holt stated there is a difference between hiding something and putting it in everyone's face. Mr. Windham stated such things should not be celebrated.

Mr. Wearing stated nothing would be celebrated. The history would be told as it happened.

Mayor Eady thanked the City Councilmembers for their honest and open dialogue.

Mr. Longcrier stated that their organization does not do monuments. Their markers contain the same type of content that the Georgia Historical Society has placed around the state about the Civil War. He is willing to be flexible on the directional signs and appreciates Mayor Eady's offer to reimburse them if they are not used. He stated that he has been working with Matt and Jody ever since the signs were delivered, and COVID-19 has impacted the City's ability to work on the project as well as other priorities that were competing with this project.

Ms. Williams stated that she has this issue on the agenda for her committee meeting tomorrow.

Mayor Eady stated that the Race Committee would come back with a recommendation for the City Council regarding the Trail Blazer directional signs. He also reiterated his belief that the City Council should at a minimum reimburse their organization for the cost if the decision is not to put up any other signs. The Committee will also provide its recommendations on any wording changes needed for the marker at Old Church.

Mr. Longcrier mentioned that the marker and one directional sign was approved in 2013, but Mayor Roseberry had some reservations about the design of the directional sign, and he was willing to be flexible about that matter. He is willing to make any changes to the marker the Committee recommends.

7. Sanitation Services for E. George Street

Mayor Eady reminded the City Council that at the last City Council Work Session a discussion took place about a driveway in common that has come to be referred to as East George Street. The City Council discussed the pros and cons of purchasing additional right-of-way and spending funds to improve the public alleyway in order to make it adhere to City requirements for public streets. The conclusion of the City Council was to take no action. There was also discussion about whether the City-contracted garbage truck should be going down the common driveway, or if the citizens who own these properties should be required to bring their roll carts to Emory Street for sanitation service.

Since that meeting Mayor Eady asked if Latham had made any complaints about access to the homes and was advised they have not. At the end of the driveway there is a large concrete driveway that goes to a large shed. It provides ample space for the garbage truck or a fire engine to turn around. His recommendation is to go with the status quo. If Latham Sanitation is willing to go down the driveway to pick up garbage, we should continue this practice. The people who created this situation are either deceased or no longer live on the properties. If the current residents wish to come to the City Council and negotiate about improving the driveway to make it a public road, that issue can be addressed separately.

George Holt advised he did view the large driveway Mayor Eady described and agrees with him. He does not want to impose a punitive decision on the current residents. His only concern is that the residents know it is not a city street and the City of Oxford is not responsible for any repairs to the driveway caused by Latham Sanitation.

Avis Williams, Lynn Bohanan, James Windham and Jeff Wearing agreed with Mr. Holt.

Mayor Eady advised he already needs to discuss some issues with the property owners and will make sure they are aware that the City of Oxford bears no responsibility or liability for the condition of the driveway.

Mr. Holt stated that if the property owners wish to have the driveway upgraded to a public street, they should bear responsibility for all of the cost.

8. **City Cemetery Committee** (Attachment E)

Mayor Eady announced that Lynn Bohanan has agreed to chair the committee to work on the City Cemetery agreement. James Windham will also serve on the committee. He advised them to feel empowered to recruit additional members to work with them as appropriate. The goal of the committee is to come back with a recommendation to the City Council of what the agreement with the Oxford Historical Cemetery Foundation should be moving forward.

The old agreement has expired, and a new agreement is needed. They should get a sense of the sentiment of the foundation as well as other stakeholders, recognizing that the foundation was established because the City was not doing anything to maintain the cemetery. About twenty years ago a disparity issue was raised regarding certain sections of the cemetery, and the City and the foundation tried to address that issue.

Ms. Bohanan stated that she needs a starting point for the discussion. Mayor Eady recommended that she contact Anderson Wright, who knows a great deal about the history.

9. **Work Session Meeting Review**

- a. DDA greenspace proposal – the City likes it in concept but wants to retain ownership of the property. The City will come up with more formalized plans for the area.
- b. FY2022 Budget Calendar – City Councilmembers should provide input to Mayor Eady and Matt Pepper

- c. Multifunction Copier – Marcia Brooks, Mayor Eady and Matt Pepper will come back to the City Council with a final recommendation.
- d. Georgia Civil War Heritage Trails Signage – The Committee on Race will bring a recommendation to the City Council on the status of the proposed and existing signs.
- e. Sanitation Services for E. George Street – No change to current services. The City will communicate to the residents that they are responsible for repairs to the driveway.
- f. City Cemetery Committee – Lynn Bohanan chairing, James Windham serving

10. Adjourn

Mayor Eady adjourned the meeting at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer