



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
REGULAR SESSION
MONDAY, July 6, 2020 – 7:10 PM
Via Teleconference**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

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

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Pepper – City Manager
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Melissa Pratt – Associate Clerk
Scottie Croy – Asst. Public Works Supervisor
Dave Harvey – Police Chief
David Strickland – City Attorney

OTHERS PRESENT: Art Vinson, Laurie Vinson, Alice McKnight, Michael McQuaide, Mike Ready, Laura Gafnea (Oxford College), Joseph Budd, Cheryl Budd, Tom Spigolon (Covington News).

1. The meeting was called to order by the Hon. David Eady, Mayor.
2. The invocation was delivered by Avis Williams.
3. Pledge of Allegiance.
4. **A motion was made by James Windham to accept the Agenda for July 6, 2020. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).**
(Attachment A)
5. **A motion was made by James Windham to accept the Consent Agenda for July 6, 2020. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).** (Attachment B)
6. **Mayor's Report**
Mayor Eady emphasized the importance of the census to the City of Oxford because it impacts funding at the local level. As of this week, Oxford has a response rate of 63.1%, which is the best for Newton County but is still not good enough. Continued posts on the website as well as a mailout are needed. Matt Pepper advised that Oxford College has submitted all their responses.

The sod replacement project will cost less because not all homeowners have agreed to the terms of replacing the sod.

A first draft of the Hwy. 81 Sidewalk Concept Study has been received. Some additional information has been requested based on that draft. Once the response is received the study will be presented to the City Council for discussion.

In regard to a question that came up at the previous Council meeting on June 15, 2020, Mayor Eady wanted the record to reflect that on August 6, 2018 the Council unanimously approved the conveyance of the property along the East Clark Street right-of-way and the property behind Orna Villa (1008 Emory Street) to the Downtown Development Authority (DDA).

7. **Planning Commission Recommendations/Petitions**

The Planning Commission recommends the approval of the variance request for 903 Asbury Street (Item #12).

8. **Citizen Concerns**

None.

9. **COVID-19 Update**

Tape was removed from the pavilion and playground equipment at Asbury Street Park on June 29th. Temporary signs were placed there to remind patrons to take precautions (wear a mask, wash hands, social distance) and permanent signs have been ordered. City Hall also opened to the public on June 29th. Matt Pepper advised the opening of City Hall has been relatively smooth. Masks have been offered to those who did not come in wearing one, and they have accepted and worn them without issue. There has been a steady stream of customers, but not to the point that it has been necessary to separate them. Staff placed markers on the floor as a social distancing guide, and they are practicing social distancing, using hand sanitizer, and wearing masks. City Hall staff has a schedule for cleaning customer touch points at least once each hour.

Marcia Brooks added that hand sanitizer dispensers have been installed in the lobby of City Hall, and another one will be installed in the hallway to the Community Room. She also stated that an American Red Cross (ARC) blood drive is scheduled for August 18th in the Community Room. Unless Mayor Eady or someone on the City Council has concerns about this, she will need to begin publicizing the event very soon. Laura McCanless stated she does not have any concerns. Her family has been to some ARC blood drives and everyone present is required to wear a mask including the staff of the blood drive. Mayor Eady asked about testing of COVID-19 antibodies at the blood drive. Ms. Brooks stated that they are doing that at some blood drives, but the coordinator was not yet able to tell us if that option would be available at the Oxford blood drive.

Mayor Eady stated that in light of the increase of COVID-19 positive cases in Newton County in recent weeks, he recommends city staff clearly state on our social media platforms and on all signage that a mask is required in public spaces in Oxford. A mask must always be worn by customers inside City Hall, and in city parks a mask must be worn in situations where social distancing is not possible. **James Windham made a motion to**

require wearing of masks in all public places in the City of Oxford. Laura McCanless seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (7/0).

Mr. Windham reiterated the previous discussion that the City Council supports the authority of the mayor, city manager and city clerk to make an administrative decision regarding the need to close City Hall again if conditions warrant without the approval of the full City Council. Mayor Eady acknowledged this decision and stated any more drastic measures would be brought before the City Council before action is taken.

Laura McCanless asked about Oxford College's plans for compliance with the mask requirements, given their intention to have some students on campus for Fall semester. Laura Gafnea stated that students and faculty are being offered the opportunity to take or teach courses online or in person. They are still receiving feedback about preferences, so those results are still forthcoming.

All in-person classes will be set up for social distancing. There will be a no visitor policy on campus at least through Fall semester. Students who do come to campus will be provided with masks. They are working on plans to limit dorm room density in their residence halls. Faculty who will be on site are working with their Operations team to ensure they are equipped with adequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for their classroom spaces so they can teach safely. All faculty, students and staff on site will be required to wear masks.

Mayor Eady asked about their aggressive plan for testing returning students. Ms. Gafnea advised she would get the Mayor and City Council some specifics about the testing plan. The dining hall will not be open to the public, and Ms. Gafnea will put the word out on social media so that the public is aware of this. They are also working on plans to reduce density in the dining hall, such as grab and go meals, outdoor dining, etc.

Ms. McCanless asked about the status of court in Oxford given the recent court closing in Newton County due to several court staff testing positive for COVID-19. She wanted to ensure that as we are moving forward, we are taking appropriate precautions. Mayor Eady reviewed the report provided by Court Clerk Dawn Stubbs regarding June's court proceedings, in which COVID-19 precautions were taken and it was conducted efficiently and safely. Staff will continue to be in contact with the judge and solicitor to ensure they do not have any concerns moving forward. Mr. Pepper added that the Newton County court facilities are scheduled to reopen around the 14th or 15th of July, and Oxford's next court date is July 16th.

10. Discussion on Transportation-Special Purpose Local Options Sales Tax (T-SPLOST) (Attachment C)

Newton County has drafted an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to include the municipalities within Newton County in a TSPLOST question on the November ballot. The IGA must be executed by July 21st. The City Council can decide tonight whether to support this effort and sign the IGA or defer the vote until the July 20th work session. The proposed IGA allots 3.02% of the proceeds of the 1% sales tax (high estimate of \$1,694,000 over 5

years) to the City of Oxford if the TSPLOST question passes on the November ballot. The question before the City Council is whether the City of Oxford will sign the agreement to allow citizens to vote on the TSPLOST question on the November ballot.

Ms. McCanless asked for clarification on what the money could be used for. Specifically, she wanted to know if the money could cover replacement of conventional streetlights with LED lights that could be more directed to reduce disturbing people in their homes and would be more efficient, and if it could cover bike lanes. Since the money must be spent on transportation projects, the city would need to be somewhat creative with how the money is spent. The City of Oxford has a fixed amount of paving, and it would not be right to keep repaving just to spend the money.

Mayor Eady stated there are a couple of different approaches that can be taken. If projects are specified, the money can only be spent for the projects specified. The other approach is to specify categories of projects, which allows for more discretion on specifically what the money is spent on. Following the second approach, Ms. McCanless' ideas could be executed if desired. If the cities do not sign the IGA, Newton County could still move forward with the question on the ballot but would only be able to impose a .75% sales tax ..

Mr. Windham proposed that the City Council send a letter to Newton County stating our interest in using some of the funds for pedestrian and bicycle safety.

All City Council members were in favor of signing the IGA to allow the question to be on the ballot.

Mayor Eady recommended that the City Council think about the categories they would like to propose for the sales tax proceeds and discuss their recommendations during the work session on July 20th. After the work session, a vote can be taken. If the City Council approves signing the IGA, it can be sent to Newton County along with the categories and a resolution expressing the sentiments stated by Mr. Windham.

Mr. Wearing stated that whatever we propose is really just a wish list, because over the five-year period that the sales tax is collected, the goals and priorities of the county could change considerably. Therefore, it is better to submit general categories rather than specific projects.

Lynn Bohanan asked if proceeds are allocated to a specific project, then that project comes in under budget, does the city lose the remaining amount allocated, or can it be used for something else.

David Strickland advised that the categories need to be adequate to pass muster but should be somewhat generic to allow the city to move the money around when needed. Matt Pepper added that the agreement explicitly states that if a project comes in under budget, the remaining funds can be moved to another transportation related project. Mayor Eady stated that should apply to categories of projects as well.

Mr. Windham asked if this money could be used to lobby the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) concerning the routing of State Highway 81 through the City of Oxford. Mr. Strickland stated he would have to do some research on whether this use of the money would be permissible. He recommends stating the categories as broadly as possible, and he will do some further research on whether any of the funds could be used for lobbying or political activities to further the goals of the City of Oxford through participation in the TSPLOST.

Mayor Eady stated a special called session would be held before the work session on July 20th.

11. **Discussion on the Consecutive Water System Agreement** (Attachment D)

The City of Oxford was previously under a 25-year agreement with Newton County and the consecutive water systems regarding the distribution and treatment of potable water. The most recent one-year agreement bought some time while the former Mayor (Jerry Roseberry) worked with the County and the other municipalities to bring more structure and discipline to how the system is being managed and the funds are being accounted for.

Matt Pepper added that the impetus of this effort was the Service Delivery Strategy (SDS) agreement executed last year. Also, the municipalities want more say in how Newton County manages the water system if the water is going to be purchased exclusively from Newton County. Particularly, municipalities would like more say on capital projects taken on by the County. These projects are impacted by bonds and loans taken on by Newton County that impact the municipalities' wholesale water rates. The municipalities want to be able to review the financial statements and justifications for such improvements to gain a better understanding of why projects are taken on and how the wholesale rates will be impacted.

Mr. Strickland has reviewed the proposed IGA and spoken with Covington's attorney, who advised him that Covington plans to sign the IGA. He recommends agreeing to it because he believes Newton County will not make a better offer.

Laura McCanless made a motion to approve signing the Consecutive Water System IGA. Avis Williams seconded the motion.

Discussion: Ms. McCanless asked if Newton County is responsible for maintenance of the master meters where we purchase water from Newton County. Scottie Croy responded that he believes they are.

Mr. Windham asked if it is time to appoint a different person to represent the City of Oxford on the Newton County Water and Sewerage Authority Board, since our current representative has not lived in the city for the past eight years. Mayor Eady stated that issue will be added to a work session agenda.

The motion carried unanimously (7/0).

12. Variance Request for 903 Asbury Street (Attachment E)

A request has been made by Laurie and Art Vinson for a variance on the minimum side setback requirement for their property at 903 Asbury Street. The Oxford Planning Commission recommends approval of the request.

James Windham made a motion to approve the request for a variance. George Holt seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (7/0).

13. Voting Delegates for the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia (MEAG)

(Attachment F)

A voting delegate and alternate are appointed by the city to serve as the city's representatives for MEAG. Neither of the designated officials are still on the City Council so new delegates must be appointed. Mayor Eady as the primary delegate and James Windham as the alternate delegate are the recommended appointees in the proposed resolution.

George Holt made a motion to approve the resolution designating David Eady and James Windham as voting delegates for MEAG. Avis Williams seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (7/0).

14. Invoice Approval

Ms. McCanless asked how many more payments would be made on the Moore Street sidewalk. Mr. Pepper stated there should be one more payment, and the project is about 90% complete.

Ms. McCanless asked if the sign replacement project was paid from a grant. Mayor Eady stated that all but \$6,500 of it was.

Mr. Holt asked if the payment for the speed bumps on East Soule Street had been completed. Several Council members were disappointed in the outcome of this project. Mayor Eady stated that they conformed to what was approved. Ms. McCanless suggested using a different contractor to install a third speed bump between the two existing ones. Mr. Windham stated that the ones in Jersey and Good Hope are much better. Ms. McCanless asked if staff could get information from them about the contractors they used. Mayor Eady stated it is also important to use state specifications in the request for proposals. Staff will contact the municipalities to obtain details. Mayor Eady stated that Chief Harvey provided him with some data indicating the speed of traffic had slowed down on East Soule Street since installation of the speed bumps.

James made a motion to approve the invoices over \$1,000.00. Lynn Bohanan seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (7/0).

15. Executive Session

None

16. **Jeff Wearing made a motion to adjourn Regular Session at 8:17 pm. Lynn Bohanan seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).**

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer