



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
REGULAR SESSION
MONDAY, October 5, 2020 – 7:00 PM
Via Teleconference**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

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

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Pepper – City Manager
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Melissa Pratt – Associate Clerk
Jody Reid – Public Works Supervisor
Dave Harvey – Police Chief
David Strickland – City Attorney

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Lynn Bohanan – Councilmember

OTHERS PRESENT: Barbara Cole, Art Vinson, Tom Spigolon (Covington News)

1. The meeting was called to order by the Hon. David Eady, Mayor.
2. Invocation
3. Pledge of Allegiance.
4. **A motion was made by Avis Williams to accept the Agenda for October 5, 2020. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).**
(Attachment A)
5. **A motion was made by Avis Williams to accept the Consent Agenda for October 5, 2020. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).** (Attachment B)
6. **Mayor's Report**
Mayor Eady advised he attended a meeting the previous week with the local churches, nonprofit organizations, and Laura Gafnea and Lyn Pace with Oxford College. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the best ways to help members of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was determined that Mt. Zion First Baptist Church will be a centralized community drop-off point for donating food. Pastor Charlie Williams is coordinating this effort with the other pastors in the community. People can also pick up food from there. Pastor Williams can be contacted at 404-250-2723 for any immediate needs. He will provide further details that can be posted on our website.

They also discussed clothing needs for job interviews. The churches have been working with First United Methodist Church in Covington to get food items to Oxford churches, but they wanted to collect food and clothing items within the local community.

There are some individuals who are struggling with paying rent/mortgage and/or utility bills. The City of Oxford does not have a quick or efficient way to set up a way to help people with this need. Additionally, a conflict of interest exists with the City helping pay utility bills. Mayor Eady encouraged individuals to make cash donations to the churches and make a notation that they are for COVID-19 relief.

7. **Planning Commission Recommendations/Petitions**

None.

8. **Citizen Concerns**

Barbara Cole discussed the condition of Asbury Street Park on weekends. She advised that the trash cans around the pavilion overflow on the weekends. She also stated that the containers for pet waste have never been emptied (as told to them by other park patrons). Mayor Eady stated he will address both of these issues with the staff.

Ms. Cole stated that the Little Library at Asbury Street Park is a success. The community is using it extensively.

9. **COVID-19 Update**

Matt Pepper stated a letter was sent to all customers notifying them that penalties, fees, and disconnects would resume. Mayor Eady added that many of the delinquencies the City is seeing at this point are customers who have always had issues with paying their utility bills in a timely manner. Matt Pepper stated that the City is working with those who are experiencing difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mayor Eady stated that the City has received reimbursement for all of its Phase I CARES Act Funding. No information has been received yet on how the remaining phases will be distributed.

10. **First Reading to Amend Chapter 38 – Vegetation** (Attachment C)

Mayor Eady presented the first reading of an amendment to the City of Oxford Code of Ordinances stating that only native vegetation will be used on City properties.

11. **First Reading to Amend Sec. 8-124. Non licensed sales** (Attachment D)

Mayor Eady presented the first reading of an amendment to the City of Oxford Code of Ordinances to expand the types of items which can be sold by vendors at the City's Farmer's Market. Marcia Brooks stated that the daily rental fee per space was removed from the version that was reviewed at the last Council work session. It will be incorporated in an update to the City of Oxford Fee Schedule at a later time. In the meantime, vendors will not be charged a rental space fee.

Melissa Pratt stated that about six vendors have stated they will be ready to start soon. She is still waiting to hear from Daniel Parson at Oxford College as to whether Oxford College's policies will allow him to participate this year.

12. **Right of Way Survey** (Attachment E)

Mayor Eady stated that the Councilmembers were provided with copies of invoices from Jordan Engineering for right-of-way work completed thus far, as well as the current survey with gaps in the northwest part of town along with some easements. Jordan Engineering has submitted a proposal to complete the missing parts of the survey of the City for \$1,760.00.

Laura McCanless made a motion to approve the proposal from Jordan Engineering to complete the survey. Avis Williams seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Jeff Wearing expressed concern about Jordan Engineering's estimate. Based on previous invoices, he believes the actual cost could be a lot higher. He would like for Jordan Engineering to provide additional detail or for the City of Oxford to place a cap on the cost.

Mayor Eady stated that the quote provided has a very precise scope with estimated time to complete the job.

George Holt agreed with Mr. Wearing because it is his contention that Jordan Engineering has severely underestimated its costs in the past, then billed for much more than was estimated. He also does not understand why the work is needed.

Mr. Wearing expressed concern about Jordan Engineering invoicing everything in whole hours up until the last year or so.

James Windham pointed out that this is an estimate. He also stated that typically contractors deal in full hours or full days due to the time required to move workers from one job to another.

Ms. McCanless stated she feels the work needs to be done because it will give the City some vital information for future decision making in that quadrant of the City.

Mr. Wearing stated he does not disagree with the need for the work. However, he feels that the city engineer has been given free reign in the past and he does not feel the city engineer is being fair.

Mayor Eady discouraged assertions about whether the city engineer has been billing fairly since the City began its relationship with them without giving specificity about what is inappropriate. He offered to have the city engineer review all the invoices with the Council in detail if they desire. He emphasized that the invoices provided to the Council included other jobs that were not part of the initial proposal for surveying the city boundaries.

Mr. Holt stated he could not tell on some of the invoices what the city engineer was doing.

Mr. Windham stated that one of the reasons the city engineer was contracted was that a number of surveyors engaged prior to them “threw up their hands” because researching the history of the city boundaries was so complicated, they oftentimes had to go back to the original records. The large maps produced by Jordan Engineering after their first phase of work reflected these complications. He further stated that he would prefer the city engineer’s estimates had more contingencies built in for unexpected situations, but feels they are honest and ethical people.

Mr. Holt stated they were not questioning the city engineer’s honesty, but the City also needs to watch its pocketbook. Mr. Windham agreed but feels that the Council does not always take into consideration the level of complexity involved with what the city engineer has been asked to do.

The motion carried by a majority vote (4/2). Mayor Eady, Laura McCanless, Avis Williams, and James Windham voted yay. George Holt and Jeff Wearing voted nay.

Mayor Eady asked all Councilmembers to mark up the copies of the invoices with any questions they have. Matt Pepper will set up a time for the vendor to meet with the Council to address their questions.

13. Water Main Replacement Project

The City of Oxford had applied for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to replace an aging water main in the southwest area of the City in some low-income, predominantly African-American neighborhoods on Oxford Road, Keel Street, and Perry Circle. Oxford was not awarded the grant this year but can reapply in 2021. During the last Council meeting, questions were raised about the frequency and cost of water main breaks in this area, and whether it would be better to replace the water main immediately rather than waiting for possible approval of the grant in about one year.

Mayor Eady and Matt Pepper prepared an analysis which was distributed to the Councilmembers. The City purchases more water each year than it sells. The difference is considered lost water, and it is due to water main breaks and leaks throughout the system. The average cost for lost water each year is \$43,532. All systems can expect to experience some lost water between 10-20%. The assumption is that about half of Oxford’s lost water is due to water main breaks and the rest is due to system loss.

Jody Reid confirmed for James Windham that at one point the water loss for Oxford was about 25%-30%, and some backflow valves were installed that brought it down to about 15%.

Mayor Eady stated that in addition to the financial implications, there are also equity concerns when these residents lose access to their water for hours or days at a time due to breaks.

If the City does not apply for the grant again, it will be necessary to use Water/Sewer Capital Project funds, and this project will deplete the money that is set aside for this purpose. This project is eligible for the grant, whereas other projects may not be eligible for it. His intention in bringing up the financial implications is to provide all information so the Council can make a fully informed decision on this issue.

George Holt commented that the main concern the last time this issue was discussed was the quality of water due to water main breaks. Once he understood the quality of water was not impacted, he felt more comfortable waiting to reapply for the grant.

Mayor Eady stated that the City will get the scorecard back from DCA on the grant application previously submitted, which will help the City determine how to improve its grant application submission next year. The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) will also provide assistance again with the new application.

Mr. Holt made the comment that the funds have been set aside for the past three years and are there for that purpose. Mayor Eady agreed but stated that other projects that come up will have to be budgeted for. Mr. Holt advised that Jody Reid had prioritized the needs for the water/sewer system, and the other items had already been completed with the exception of the work to be done on Queen Anne Street and Stone Street, which is already included in the budget.

James Windham asked if there is anything that can be done to mitigate the problem in this area until the work can be completed. Mr. Reid did not know of any measures that could be taken. Because it is a loop system, he does not know of any way to eliminate any pressures on it. Mr. Windham stated when sediment gets in their water it is an added burden to them because it gets in their hot water heaters, filters, and other equipment through no fault of their own. He feels the City should move forward with the project now.

Mr. Wearing thanked Mayor Eady and Matt Pepper for the information. He stated his belief that financially the City would be sound if the money was spent now. He also supports the effort to improve the system for that community. His concern is that the cost is severely understated because much of the line rests on a rock shelf. Mr. Pepper stated the Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) that stated the estimated amount came from Carter & Sloope. Mr. Wearing asked if the PER included a rock clause.

Mayor Eady clarified that this project would deplete the money in the Water/Sewer Capital Projects bank account, and the City would have to build it back up. But there is money in other accounts that would help cover the cost.

George Holt made a motion to table the decision on this project until these issues can be investigated further. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion.

Matt Pepper commented that the NEGRC is anxious to hear whether the City wants to apply using their resources. They are evaluating the staffing demands for the cities they

will be working with. Mr. Pepper stated their fee will be \$1,500. Mr. Wearing asked if the City could apply anyway and pull out the application if a decision is made to move forward before the grants are awarded. Mayor Eady agreed to this strategy.

The motion carried unanimously (6/0).

Mr. Windham asked for the complete engineering report. Matt Pepper advised he would provide this report to the Councilmembers.

14. Downtown Development Authority Appointment

Mayor Eady made a recommendation to appoint Laura McCanless to the City of Oxford Downtown Development Authority.

George Holt made a motion to approve the appointment of Laura McCanless to the City of Oxford Downtown Development Authority. Avis Williams seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (6/0).

15. Invoices (Attachment F)

The Council reviewed the invoices paid by the City of Oxford for \$1,000 or more in September 2020.

16. Executive Session

None.

17. Adjourn

Jeff Wearing made a motion to adjourn at 8:06 p.m. George Holt seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously (6/2).

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer