



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2020 – 6:30 PM
CITY HALL**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

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

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

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

Councilmember Avis Williams was not present.

OTHERS PRESENT: Theresa Eady, Nick Cole, Barbara Cole, Cheryl Ready, Mike Ready, Gwendolyn Green, Darryl Welch – Covington News

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor's Announcements

Mayor Eady called the meeting to order and made the following announcements:

- The American Red Cross will have a Blood Drive in the Community Room at City Hall on April 1st from 10 am to 2 pm.
- Oxford College held a grand opening celebration on February 2, 2020 for its new Campus Life Center. Mayor Eady and Councilmembers George Holt and Avis Williams attended.
- The annual Arbor Day Celebration will be held in the Dean's Dining Hall at Oxford College at 10 am on February 22nd.
- The American Community Survey is not the same as the United States Census. Anyone who completed the American Community Survey a few months ago will still need to complete the 2020 U.S. Census. Residents should be receiving a census form in the mail in the near future. Completion of the census is important because local and federal funding is tied to it, and it is also good to know the makeup of the community.

2. Yarbrough House Renovations (Attachment B)

Mayor Eady has received several questions from the community that he would like to address concerning the Yarbrough House renovations.

a. Why is the structural integrity of the house just now being discussed?

The City of Oxford made a strategic decision to purchase the house when the opportunity became available. At the time of purchase, Bureau Veritas inspected the house and found nothing of any concern regarding structural integrity. The City of Oxford recently hired Carter Watkins to begin working on architectural designs, and they raised the concern in their report. A house of that age is likely to have rotted wood and termite damage, and the ability to examine the underside of Yarbrough House is very limited due to its close proximity to the ground.

The only viable solution that will give a high level of confidence in the condition of the house is to tear up the floor and examine the wood underneath. Hiring a structural engineer at this stage would not be helpful because they would not be able to give a definitive answer about the condition of the house without removing flooring either. The City Council and staff have been debating whether to tear up the floor, which is the reason this issue is coming up now. Mayor Eady advised as much wood as possible would be salvaged to put back in the house. The only alternative is jacking up the house, which is exorbitantly expensive, and not a realistic solution.

Mr. Windham stated that when Bureau Veritas inspected the house, an asbestos professional was on site who stated that there is asbestos in the home, and this information was included in their report, but it was not stated where in the house it was. Mr. Windham recommends an asbestos inspection before it is opened to the public. Mayor Eady asked Mr. Reid to follow up with Bureau Veritas to get some more information about this statement in the report.

b. Can the proposed uses of the house be accomplished through use of existing space at City Hall?

Mayor Eady stated that when Melvin Baker was on the City Council, he led a committee that spoke to a number of people in the community, and they sought input from historical experts at the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC). The recommendation of that committee was that the house would be well used as a welcome center/museum. Over time the purpose has evolved into a community center. The City of Oxford then hired Erik Oliver to conduct a historical study of the property, and he concurred with the City Council's plans. The Oxford Historical Society has walked through the house, and they concur as well. There has also been discussion about the Society curating displays in the building.

At City Hall we do have the Community Room, but there are issues with security of City Hall records and money in this building. Mr. Windham pointed out that if the Community Room is made available for this purpose, a staff member would have to let them in and work outside normal business hours.

Mr. Windham recommended a committee to come to some kind of compromise on the use of the building. Part of the responsibility with this house is to make sure taxpayer funds are spent to benefit the most people. He believes the greatest benefit would be derived from making part of it suitable for meeting space and locking off part of it to preserve it.

Mayor Eady is not interested in forming another committee. He believes the City Council needs to come to a decision about how the facility should be used and how it should be renovated.

Mr. Holt asked if the City of Oxford is still working with Carter Watkins. Mayor Eady advised the city is not working with them. Mr. Holt expressed concern about spending any more funds on professional consulting fees and wants to spend the least amount possible to get the building usable. He agrees with Mr. Windham's proposal.

Mr. Windham also stated that the outside would be appropriate as a quiet garden for the citizens of Oxford.

Ms. Bohanan agrees with making as few changes as possible to the inside and outside. As for end use of the house, she does not have any issues with the ideas that have been proposed thus far. She does agree that parts of the house not being used should be sectioned off.

Ms. McCanless agrees and supports Option A of the three architectural options included in the attachment. She feels that Option A retains the most historical value and charm, and therefore makes it more marketable.

- c. Have ongoing costs been considered once renovations have been considered?

The City of Oxford is aware that there will be ongoing costs of insurance and utilities. There are no plans to staff the facility with City employees. Once renovations are complete, the current thought is that the Oxford Historical Society will curate displays and manage rental of the facility. Mr. Windham feels that renters should be able to come to City Hall to pick up a key.

Mr. Wearing stated that completing the steps of verifying structural integrity of the house will dictate to some extent the next steps that are taken. Mayor Eady stated that the next step is to get to a point where the City Council can vote on one of the plans for renovation and release the project for bids. The City of Oxford will need to work with a contractor who understands that unforeseen issues may arise, but those issues will have to be dealt with as they come up.

Ms. Gwendolyn Green asked if interior sprinklers are required. She also expressed concerns about all the issues to deal with in an old house, such as moisture under

the house. Mayor Eady advised a water barrier will be put in when the floors are pulled up to protect the wood. The City is not aware of any requirements for sprinklers.

d. Is the standing seam metal roof historically appropriate?

Standing seam metal roofs have been used in the Southeast United States since the mid-1800s. They are found more often on farmhouses than on houses in cities, but this house is not considered “fancy.” This house was built around 1875. It is as appropriate as a variety of other materials that may have been used then, including asphalt shingles and wood shake shingles.

Ms. McCanless stated that the most likely roof types used on a house like this would have been a milled wood shingle or a standing seam metal roof. Mayor Eady stated that there has been a metal roof on the house for at least fifty years.

Mayor Eady advised he would put a document together for the Council to vote on once he has information back from Mr. Reid about the asbestos issue. He does not see the need to spend more money on additional architectural drawings.

Mr. Windham stated he hopes the result would be a combination of Options B and C. Ms. McCanless stated that would change the historical profile of the house and would cost more money. Ms. Bohanan feels Option A is the obvious choice because it is the most economical, stays true to the historical profile of the building, and is supported by the Oxford Historical Society. Mr. Holt wants to do the minimum amount of work required to make the building safe while keeping it basically like it is in appearance.

Mayor Eady stated the next steps to get drawings updated:

- Keep the house as is except for the back part
- Repurpose back section into ADA compliant bathrooms
- Make these bathrooms accessible from inside and outside
- Incorporate ability to shut off part of the house

Mayor Eady will work with Ms. McCanless to have Forrest McCanless update the CAD drawings, then talk to some contractors to find out how much documentation is needed before hiring a contractor. The plans provided by Carter Watkins are subject to copyright and they are not willing to release them to the City of Oxford.

Ms. Green asks where parking would be, and in particular, handicap parking. Mayor Eady advised the current plan is to have parking where the garage was, including handicap spaces, and have a ramp going into the building from the parking lot.

3. Traffic Calming (Attachment C)

Mr. Pepper discussed two bids the City of Oxford has received for placing traffic calming devices on East Soule Street. The lowest bid per speed hump is from Designed Installations at a cost of \$2,227.50 per speed hump. If the city wishes to move forward with installation of the speed humps, staff recommends hiring Designed Installations to complete the job. Mayor Eady added that the plan for now is to install two speed humps, and a third one can be added between the first two if it is determined later that it is needed.

Mr. Wearing asked Chief Harvey if the proposal is consistent with what he originally recommended. Chief Harvey confirmed that it is.

Mr. Holt asked if photographs are available to see what the finished product would look like. He has seen some that have concrete blocks and have white reflective paint shaped in triangles to give them some depth for visibility at night. Mr. Reid advised they will have yellow paint. They are made of asphalt and anchored into the road. They are similar to a speed table but create a hump rather than a flat top. Ms. Bohanan pointed out that there will also be signage to warn drivers on approach to the speed humps.

Mr. Reid advised he would find out if arrows could be painted on the humps. Mayor Eady advised the Council would vote on moving forward with this work at the next regular Council session.

4. Maintenance Contract for Asbury Street Park (Attachment D)

Mayor Eady stated that Great Estates Landscaping has been performing maintenance at Asbury Street Park on a month-to-month basis. The proposed contract retains Great Estates for one (1) year at a total cost of \$6,500 for grass cutting, weed control, and ant control. No pesticides or herbicides will be used.

Ms. Theresa Eady asked why this work is not done in house by City of Oxford employees. Mayor Eady explained that our grounds crew is extremely busy cutting rights of way and other city property. The City does not have a team trained for formal landscaping. The cost is less than hiring another full-time employee.

5. Replace Storm Drain on Longstreet Circle (Attachment E)

Mr. Pepper advised that the storm drain at this location has eroded away and is caving in. The City of Oxford plans for storm drain maintenance but does not have enough money budgeted to complete this replacement and the repair to the storm drain on Moore Street (see #6). Mayor Eady advised the City can make an amendment to the budget to move funds from the Capital Projects budget to cover these expenses. Two bids were obtained for this replacement. The staff recommendation is to hire the low bidder to make the replacement (HCS Services, LLC - \$11,700). The pipe will be replaced with reinforced plastic pipe.

6. Repair Storm Drain on Moore Street (Attachment F)

The storm drain box structure in the street has collapsed on Moore Street. The box will be moved to be under the sidewalk so that it will only have pedestrian traffic over it rather than motor vehicle traffic. This work will be performed concurrently with the Moore Street sidewalk project. The staff recommendation is to hire the low bidder to make the repair (HCS Services, LLC - \$23,500).

7. FY2019 LMIG Excess Funds (Attachment G)

Mr. Pepper stated that each year the City of Oxford receives funds from the State of Georgia to repair streets in the City. There were some funds remaining from FY2019, and the City has three (3) years to spend it. Staff proposes using the funds to do deep patching repairs to ten (10) areas on Longstreet Circle. This street never had a good base, which has contributed to this problem. Performing deep patching will seal the existing areas and prevent water damage to them. This is an interim solution until the road can be repaved. Staff recommends awarding this project to the low bidder of two (2) bids (MHB Paving - \$20,000.77). It is difficult to know how much base is needed before tearing up the road, so the actual cost may be a little more or less.

8. Maintenance Facility Fence (Attachment H)

During the last work session, the condition of the maintenance facility fence was discussed. Mr. Reid had recommended replacing it rather than repairing parts of it, to keep the whole fence on the same replacement cycle. At that time Mayor Eady advised the Councilmembers to go look at the fence themselves.

Mayor Eady has looked at the fence and observed that the section on Emory Street is much more weathered than the section on Asbury Street. The fence is about fourteen years old. Ms. McCanless added that the only section that looks decent is the section on Asbury Street. She also observed that the repaired/replaced fence needs to be lifted off the ground, because the parts touching the ground are infested with termites.

Ms. McCanless is willing to research other options for synthetic materials. She contacted the company that makes Trex. It is guaranteed for 25 years. It is made from recycled wood and plastic bags. The company makes a concerted effort to use environmentally friendly procedures in their manufacturing process. Mr. Reid advised that The Fence Man does not work with synthetic materials so he could not get a quote from him.

Ms. McCanless also observed that the area around the fenceposts was crumbling and did not seem like concrete.

Mayor Eady stated that the landscaping also needs some attention to keep moisture off it. Ms. Bohanan stated that the fence posts should be beveled at the top to help water run off them better. Ms. McCanless also had noticed that the basic design might need to be adjusted because there was a lot of warping in the current fence.

Ms. McCanless will continue with her research and get some bids and report back to the City Council in a few weeks.

9. George Street Park Fence (Attachment I)

Two bids are included in Attachment I for replacement of the split-rail fences on the North and South sides of George Street Park. Part of the fence sits in an easement, and that part will be replaced. The recommendation from the Trees, Parks and Recreation Board is to approve a contract with The Fence Man for \$2,675, which is the lower bid.

10. Participation in Earth Day Event

Mayor Eady announced that this year will be the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Ms. McCanless stated that Sustainable Newton would like to celebrate the event county-wide. They are checking with municipalities to see how they would like to celebrate on different days of the week. It is the week of April 22nd. Oxford might choose something related to our trails or set up a farmer's market. Oxford College might also be willing to do a kids' science fair. Mr. Windham has advocated for a long time for a bike rally, which could be incorporated into the trail map. Mayor Eady suggested asking Melissa Hage if the possibility of doing something kid-focused related to science is feasible. Ms. McCanless will circle back with Sustainable Newton to get an update on their progress in planning, and also talk to Melissa Hage.

11. Reselling Plots at the Cemetery

City Clerk Marcia Brooks requested guidance from the City Council on reselling of plots. This issue came up during the Oxford Historical Cemetery Foundation's annual meeting. An individual who owns a plot in the Oxford Historical Cemetery wishes to have a pod burial. That issue will need to be researched further by staff and presented at a future work session for discussion, but the individual also asked if in the event burial is not allowed in this manner, the plot could be sold. The selling of plots to third parties by individuals who have purchased them is not contemplated in the city's ordinances.

Mayor Eady stated the ordinance does specify that someone purchasing burial rights must live within the city limits or have lived within them in the past, and the City Council can approve exceptions to this standard under special circumstances.

Mr. Windham stated that at some point the City had changed the ordinance to convey burial rights rather than convey ownership of the plot. Staff will need to research to determine when this change occurred. Any plots that were sold prior to this change are fee-simple, and the City of Oxford cannot prohibit the sale of them. However, the City of Oxford still owns the plots that were sold with burial rights only.

Mr. Reid and Mr. Holt stated that several individuals have sold and donated plots in the past.

Mayor Eady stated that the database/map of the cemetery maintained at City Hall needs to indicate whether each purchase was/is fee simple or burial rights so that if this

issue comes up again, staff or the City Council can refer to the information to answer whether the plot(s) can be sold or not.

The family of Marguerite Antoine approached the podium to inform the City Council of their request for an exception to the requirement that only those residing within the city limits or who have resided with the city limits in the past can purchase burial rights.

Ms. Antoine was killed in a car accident the previous week. She has lived at 80 Northwood Creek Way, Oxford, Georgia for the past seventeen years and paid taxes. She had walked through the Oxford Historical Cemetery and expressed her desire to be buried there upon her death. When she died, they spoke to the City Manager and were told that if the City of Oxford made an exception for them, they would have to make one for everyone.

Ms. Antoine's daughter Genevieve told the City Council that her mother moved around a lot as a child, and she had lived in Oxford longer than any other place in her life. She attended Newton County schools and was surprised to find out they lived outside the city limits. She asked if it was possible to make an exception for this situation to allow them to purchase burial rights for her mother's cremains since all the taxes her mother paid went to Oxford.

Ms. Antoine's cousin stated that Ms. Antoine worked for the Department of Defense. Before she came to Oxford, she researched the area to ensure she wanted to buy a house and raise her children here. She was impressed with how the cemetery was set up and appreciated its history and expressed that she wanted to be buried there if she should pass away while she lives here. Her children would like to honor her wishes, and request that the City Council waive the requirement of living in the city limits to purchase burial rights. The memorial service was held at Caldwell & Cowan, and they are waiting for the city's decision regarding burial of the cremains.

Mayor Eady spoke to the technical issues while stating that they have no bearing on the City Council's ultimate decision regarding this request. The address where Ms. Antoine lived is outside the city limits of Oxford. A lot of people live outside the city limits but have an Oxford address. Her taxes would have been paid to Newton County, and Oxford would not have received any of that money. The city ordinance does give the City Council the opportunity to consider special circumstances.

Mayor Eady stated that when he first heard about the request, he was not sure about the timing, and did not realize there would be time for the City Council to discuss it.

Mr. Holt asked if the family paid any utilities to Oxford. Mr. Reid stated they are about four (4) miles outside our service area.

Mayor Eady stated he was glad the family is attending so that he can hear their personal story, which he was not previously aware of. He is 100% sure that a spot can be found in the cemetery for the family if the City Council is amenable to this, whether it

be through a donation or sale, or through the City Council selling burial rights to them. It is within the City Council's power to make an exception based on special circumstances.

Mr. Windham stated that a vote cannot be made in a work session. The next opportunity to vote would be at the regular City Council session on March 2nd. Mr. Windham asked that City of Oxford staff try to locate someone who could donate or sell a fee simple lot to the family so that they did not have to wait until the next regular session, and report back to the City Council on their findings. Mr. Windham stated he would be in favor of allowing the family to buy burial rights. All Councilmembers present concurred that they would be in favor as well.

The cost to purchase one lot is \$750.

Ms. Barbara Cole asked if it would be possible to set aside some land on the back side of the cemetery for pod burials. Mayor Eady stated that is something we should explore further. Ms. McCanless stated that pod burials are better suited for more naturalistic areas and setting aside an area away from the stones and existing graves is an excellent idea to consider. Mr. Windham stated another possible area may be the land purchased behind Orna Villa that could be made into a park.

Ms. Eady stated that the City of Oxford needs to research state requirements concerning embalming and other requirements before proceeding with allowing this type of burial. Ms. McCanless stated that the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Rockdale County allows pod burials now and the City of Oxford can look to their procedures for guidelines as well. She feels it is a realistic option and one that many would like to choose, so it would be good to offer it if we can.

Mayor Eady stated that the issue of ownership of plots will also come into play for those who have already purchased fee-simple lots or burial rights from the City of Oxford. Those who have purchased fee-simple lots can sell their lot if they would rather have a pod burial, but those who have purchased burial rights can only give theirs to a family member.

Ms. Green asked if there is a prohibition on planting trees in the cemetery, as she recalls a tree being planted during the Arbor Day celebration several years ago. Ms. Brooks stated that no decision was made at the annual Cemetery Foundation meeting.

Mayor Eady stated that the Cemetery Foundation makes no decisions about what is in the cemetery, these decisions are made by the City of Oxford.

12. Resolution for Franchise Fee (Attachment J)

Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) recommends we adopt a resolution setting our franchise fee for cable and video providers. A vendor is requesting to put fiber on

Moore Street, and the City of Oxford needs to negotiate a franchise fee with them. Setting this resolution will set a standard fee for all providers. The resolution will be voted on in the March 2nd regular session, and if passed, will be sent to the Georgia Secretary of State where a database is maintained. Major providers check this database to see if cities have these fees set.

Other Business

Mr. Windham requested that the City of Oxford draft a resolution objecting to HB 302 and Senate Bill 172 which prohibit municipalities from regulating design elements for one- and two-family dwellings. Mayor Eady asked Mr. Pepper to contact the City of Porterdales and request a copy of their resolution and Oxford can model its resolution after it.

Mr. Windham made a motion to adjourn at 8:20 p.m. Mr. Holt seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer