



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, MAY 17, 2021 – 6:41 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 & Maintenance
Supervisor

OTHERS PRESENT: Art Vinson, Melissa Hage, Michael Rogers, Laura Gafnea (Oxford College)

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor's Announcements

Mayor Eady advised that after the work session there will be a special called meeting. During this meeting, the City Council will adopt the Community Development Block Grant resolution and go into Executive Session to discuss real estate and personnel matters. Following the Executive Session, the City Council will return to open session to potentially take a vote on a real estate matter. The meeting will then adjourn.

Mayor Eady stated the tour of Dried Indian Creek will begin at Oxford College Farm at 11:00 a.m. on May 22, 2021. Box lunches will be provided. Anyone wishes to attend should notify Matt Pepper by email by May 18, 2021.

2. Committee Reports

- a. Trees Parks and Recreation (TPR) Board – Michael Rogers stated that the Board has been involved in a project to restore the tree canopy on Emory Street that was lost when the water main was upgraded. They are also working on updating their tree inventory list for the City. The Board has also reviewed guidelines for allowing individuals to donate a bench. The original request was for Asbury Street Park, but they are recommending that donations be allowed for all parks in the City.

Laura McCanless asked if the tree survey from several years ago has been located. Matt Pepper advised that Beryl Budd is working on locating that information.

- b. Planning Commission – Matt Pepper stated that the Planning Commission does not have any updates at this time.
- c. Downtown Development Authority (DDA) – Matt Pepper stated that the Authority has not met since the May Regular Session Council meeting and has no updates at this time.
- d. Sustainability Committee – Melissa Hage stated that the tour on Saturday will be conducted by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR) Stream Team.

The Committee is working with John Devine on documents for the application for the grant from GADNR to restore the Dried Indian Creek corridor. The next committee meeting is May 24, 2021 at 10:30 a.m. During this meeting they will be meeting with their student intern who will be working on a sustainability plan for the City of Oxford. Councilmembers should expect for the intern to contact them for input.

Laura McCanless encouraged those invited to come to the tour as the Stream Team provides important information to make future decisions.

Ms. Hage extended an invitation to all on the call to join the tour.

- e. Committee on Race – Avis Williams reported that the Committee will not be having an event in June because Pastors Williams and Johnson have been very busy lately with COVID relief activities. There will be some information on the City website about Juneteenth. They are planning an event for December.

3. Yarbrough House Discussion

Mayor Eady presented the idea of getting estimates to do some minimal renovation work on the Yarbrough House to make it usable as a history center/welcome center which would be operated by the Oxford Historical Society as proposed by them. Renovations would include renovating the larger bathroom, gutting the kitchen, doing wall repairs, painting, and getting it ready for use. His guess is it would cost around \$100,000, but the cost will be contingent on the cost of materials, which are priced extremely high at the moment. He recognizes that it may be more prudent to wait until the cost of materials decreases. The offer by the Society is on the table, and the renovations would need to be done before the property is utilized as a public space.

Avis Williams asked if the Oxford Historical Society is in a rush to make this move, or can the City wait a few months. Mayor Eady advised that the City does not have to be in a big hurry, but he is concerned about it continuing to deteriorate without work being done to it. However, he is sensitive to the high cost of materials right now. He would at least like to get some idea of the cost as a baseline.

George Holt stated that it has been sitting there for quite some time and can sit there a little longer. He does not feel now is the time to work on it. He does not think the City Council should take any action until the Society gives a written statement of exactly what they propose to use the property for, and an accurate estimate is obtained of the cost to complete the work.

Laura McCanless has the same concerns as others about the current cost of materials. She also wondered if there would be much interest from the public with the COVID-19 pandemic just starting to wind down.

Lynn Bohanan asked if it has been determined that this proposal is how the property will be used. She does not consider kitchens and bathrooms minor work.

Mayor Eady clarified that the work in the kitchen involves removing the cabinets to create a blank slate for the Society to put their displays up. He does agree that a nice ADA bathroom would be some significant work.

Ms. Bohanan stated she was under the impression there were other structural integrity issues that needed to be addressed before renovations could start.

Mayor Eady stated there was some discussion about removal of flooring to examine floor joists. This assessment was bolstered by some observations from an architectural firm. However, this approach would be very expensive. Other than the large bathroom, which would be torn out to the floor joists anyway due to water damage, there are not any areas of the house that seem to be in danger of collapsing.

Ms. Bohanan also expressed concerns about the cost of materials.

James Windham stated he was confused why the City Council is discussing spending \$100,000 on the Yarbrough House. The issue was discussed in the April Work Session and the conversation centered around selling the house, moving it, tearing it down, or ignoring it.

Mayor Eady confirmed that those options were discussed, and no resolution was reached. He was reminded recently by the Oxford Historical Society that their proposal had been made and was on the table.

Mr. Windham stated he thought their proposal had been rejected. He had no other comments other than that he agreed with the observations of the other City Councilmembers.

Mayor Eady stated that it seems there is consensus to not take any action at this time, and not to ask anyone to waste time obtaining estimates. He believes the proposal by the Society was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Windham stated he believes there are a lot of small projects that could be completed around town without spending a lot of money, such as removing some asphalt and planting flowers.

Jeff Wearing asked if the Society will come up with designs and recommendations. Mayor Eady advised the Society is not asking for any structural repairs to the house. They are only asking for repairs to make the structure safe for occupancy by completing the items mentioned earlier, which would be the defined scope of work. Mr. Wearing advised he is for it in general, but now may not be the best time.

Mr. Holt stated that some drawings were reviewed a year or so ago regarding the repairs under discussion. Those plans can be used to obtain an estimate.

4. **Operating Budget and Capital Budget for FY2022** (Attachment B)

A public hearing was held prior to this meeting regarding the proposed operating and capital budgets for FY2022. Councilmembers have had several opportunities to review the proposals and ask questions.

George Holt advised his questions have been answered by Matt Pepper. No other Councilmembers had questions.

5. **Employee Handbook Revision** (Attachment C)

Matt Pepper stated that the current handbook was adopted in 2011. There have been changes in the form of government and in other areas that precipitated the need for a revision. The City has worked with the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) to bring the handbook up to date. A revised version was provided to all Councilmembers along with the original version. Mr. Pepper provided an overview of the changes. He stated that City staff will be reviewing the manual on a more regular schedule and expect to bring requests for updates to the City Council periodically.

George Holt stated that it will take more than one or two work sessions to make decisions on the updates, as there are many changes. He and Luran Willis and Bob Schwartz had started working on an update several years ago. He would like to have a tracked version printed out so he can compare it to the changes they had discussed. He also does not understand some of the changes that are being proposed. He wants to make sure the City Council understands these changes. He also mentioned that the job title of Utilities Superintendent has never been voted on and needs to be changed to Utilities Supervisor.

James Windham asked if anyone has reviewed the City Charter in relation to the roles of staff and Councilmembers.

Mr. Holt also expressed concern about the "employee at will" language in the revised version because it implies that an employee can be fired without reason and the addition of another holiday (Veteran's Day).

Matt Pepper advised that the "employee at will" language was recommended by GMA staff.

Mr. Windham asked if GMA recommended carrying more than 80 hours. The City Council specifically addressed this issue in the previous writing of the handbook because employees were carrying three, four, or five years of vacation. An employer provides vacation for employees to take some time away and refresh their well-being.

Mr. Holt asked why the book lists vacation time as days rather than hours. He knows it was listed as days in the original handbook, but he feels it should be shown in hours.

Mayor Eady asked Councilmembers to consider this document a first draft and provide notes and comments to Mr. Pepper.

Marcia Brooks will provide a tracked version electronically to all Councilmembers and a printed tracked version to Mr. Holt.

Mr. Windham suggested that Mr. Holt should be involved in the revision process of the handbook at an earlier stage given his expertise in the human resources field.

6. Excess Cyber Security Liability Insurance

Matt Pepper advised that as part of our liability insurance we have cyber security liability insurance up to \$250,000. Excess liability coverage is offered to increase the limit to \$1,000,000 for \$3,380. City staff recommend purchasing this excess liability insurance. Security features are in place with the City's IT services provider including backups every four hours on site and every day off site. In addition, the provider monitors the City's network and servers 24/7 for suspicious activity as well as the most up-to-date malware threat monitoring. The excess liability insurance is another level of protection.

Laura McCanless stated it is a good idea to be proactive given recent cyber compromises. She asked what the excess insurance covers. Mr. Pepper advised it covers costs up to \$1,000,000 resulting from a ransomware attack or cyberattack. Marcia Brooks added that it pays consultant fees to restore data as well as ransom fees. George Holt asked for clarification on exactly what the insurance will pay for. Ms. Brooks advised she would provide details regarding the coverage to the Councilmembers.

James Windham requested assurance from the City's IT services provider that security is in place that can block most known ransomware. He knows that some victims of cyberattacks have not kept their security systems up to date. He supports having the extra insurance.

Avis Williams stated that their school system in Putnam County had the most up-to-date measures in place and their system was down for ten days. It cost them \$1 million to resolve the issue.

7. Work Session Meeting Review

- a. Yarbrough House – hold on any actions
- b. FY2022 Operating and Capital Budgets – adoption June 7, 2021. Millage rate will be voted on after Newton County Tax Digest is released.

- c. Employee Handbook – Councilmembers will receive electronic tracked copy for review (George Holt will receive paper copy).
- d. Excess Cyber Liability Insurance – Matt or Marcia will provide further details on coverage to Councilmembers.

8. **Adjourn**

Mayor Eady adjourned the meeting at 7:38 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer