

DRAFT

Oxford Planning Commission
Minutes for Meeting on August 14, 2012

Attendance: Patsy Burke, Jackie Ellis, Vivian Harris, Erik Oliver, Ron Manson, and Jim Patrick
Guests: Hoyt Oliver, Dean Stephen Bowen, Margaret Dugan and Raghu Patil (Oxford College)

Chairman Erik Oliver opened the meeting at 7:04 PM.

Old Business:

1. Minutes for the April 14, 2012 meeting of the Oxford Planning Commission were reviewed and unanimously approved as submitted.

New Business:

1. A request was received from Oxford College, dated August 10, 2012, for permission to erect a temporary sign for a new primary campus entrance at the intersection of Pierce and Emory Streets. This sign would be replaced by a permanent sign in the same location later in 2012. The transportation plan of the approved Oxford Future Development Plan (FDP) specifically indicates that the College would maintain Hammill Street as its primary entrance. This request therefore constitutes a change in the FDP (a change in traffic routing) and by the code requires an amendment to be reviewed and recommended by the Planning Commission to the City Council for approval. Since the Planning Commission itself had suggested a Pierce Street entrance to the College earlier, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council approve a change in the Oxford College FDP to allow for a new entrance at Pierce Street and Emory, with the understanding that the entrance sign at Hammill/Emory will be removed.
2. Several signs have been installed in city street rights-of-way by Oxford College in recent months. This is in conflict with the *City Code Section 40-1513 Permitting of Signs*, which requires prior approval by the Planning Commission, and a permit issued by the City of Oxford, and *Code Section 40-1512 Prohibited Signs*, which prohibits any non-governmental sign from being erected in a city right-of-way. Therefore the signs must be relocated immediately to sites allowed by the code. The Planning Commission and Oxford College reviewed each sign and discussed possible alternate locations for the signs. Several of these signs will meet the code requirements by being moved a few feet (which the college agreed to do shortly). However, the width of the rights-of way on Hammill, Haygood, and Pierce Streets is such that relocation of a few of the small, directional signs would render the signs useless in conveying their message. The current code does not seem to offer any flexibility on this matter. The Planning Commission recommends that the City Council review this issue and determine whether a change in the code is needed to allow for certain directional signs in city rights-of-way. In the meantime, the College has been asked to remove all signs installed in the rights-of-way except those that are temporary (short-term) related to move-in/move-out (event) and construction. The signs directing people to the temporary location of the library in Lovern Hall are considered part of the library expansion construction project and are thus deemed permissible, as are the signs erected on Moore Street identifying construction entrances.
3. A request had been received from Oxford College, dated July 26, 2012, for the city to rezone the Elizer property, Newton Co. Tax Parcel # X0050-00000-015-000 from R-20 to Institutional. The college proposes to use this property to create an organic farm for

growing and selling produce to the public and also teaching about all aspects of food production. According to the zoning code, farms are only allowed in Agricultural districts. Institutional zoning does not allow farming. The college had previously been told that the code seemed to preclude operation of a farm by a college or university, but this erroneous interpretation was clarified at the Planning Commission's July meeting. The code does not restrict ownership and management of farms, but it clearly restricts farms to Agricultural Districts.

The College proposal made the case that, because the College owns the land and the farm would be used for education, the parcel should be zoned Institutional. The Planning Commission explained that the zoning classifications pertain to land uses, not ownership, and cited several other examples of college-owned properties that are zoned according to their primary use, not ownership by the College (OxHouse Science Center, zoned Conservation; several houses zoned Residential). Indeed the new zoning map approved by the City Council last August reversed the earlier practice of zoning all College-owned property Public Institutional (a zoning category that no longer exists) and tied zoning more expressly to the actual and proposed land use and character of the surrounding areas.

In regards to educational use of a farm, the Planning Commission noted that, just as the OxHouse Science Center is zoned Conservation but also is used for field work in the College's natural science courses, it would be acceptable to use a farm for teaching food production. Dean Bowen asked the Planning Commission to make that interpretation explicit in the minutes.

No action was taken by the Planning Commission on the July 26th request. The Planning Commission will formally make its recommendation at the September meeting. The College was invited to withdraw, amend, and resubmit its request if so desired. Dean Bowen indicated he would consider options and let the Planning Commission know shortly.

Chairman Oliver adjourned the meeting at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Patrick, Secretary

