

OXFORD PLANNING COMMISSION

Minutes – April 12, 2016

MEMBERS: Jonathan Eady, Chair; Jeff Wearing, Vice-Chair; Penny England and Ron Manson. Absent were Shawn Gaither who was out of town working and Vivian Harris who was ill.

STAFF: Bob Schwartz, city manager and zoning administrator.

GUESTS: Pastor Josh Roberts and Richard Henderson from Allen Memorial United Methodist Church and Kendra Mayfield from Oxford College.

OPENING: Mr. Eady called the meeting to order and welcomed the guests.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Upon motion of Mr. Manson, seconded by Ms. England, the minutes for the meeting of February 9, 2016 were approved. (The Planning Commission did not meet in March.)

ALLEN MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SIGN PERMIT - Richard Henderson submitted a sign permit request on behalf of Allen Memorial for two signs (one at the corner of Pierce and Emory and one at the corner of Hull and Fletcher). Mr. Eady opened the discussion by reporting that he had reread the entire sign ordinance. It does not appear that an off premises sign is permitted by the sign ordinance. Presently, no churches have off premises signs except for an existing sign for Allen Memorial which is on property owned by Oxford College.

Mr. Eady referenced **Section 40-936. - Prohibited signs**

“(a) The following signs are hereby expressly prohibited from erection, construction, repair, alteration, or use within the City, except as otherwise permitted in this chapter: . . .

(2)Off-premises signs, including billboards.”

Mr. Eady noted that the only possible exception he could find would be for directional signs but that the definition did not include church signs erected by the church. The definition is contained in section 40 – 927.

“*Directional sign* means a sign permanently erected or permitted in the public right-of-way or private property by the state, or other governmental agency to denote the name of any thoroughfare, the route to any city, town, village, educational institution, public building, historic place, shrine, or hospital, to direct and regulate traffic, to denote any railroad crossing, bridge, or other transportation or transmission company for the direction or safety of the public.”

Mr. Manson noted that it is the duty of the Planning Commission to treat every applicant the same way. And that one of the purposes of the sign ordinance was to limit the number of signs within Oxford.

Mr. Eady noted that it might be possible for the town to put up a sign for the church as an historic site. Mr. Wearing noted that the entire town is a historic site according to the Methodist Church. It is a Methodist Church shrine.

Pastor Roberts asked how could we get a sign approved? Mr. Eady noted that the Council could amend the ordinance to permit any sign by any church. However, that would result in a great many more signs in town. There is a reason the ordinance is written this way - it is to limit the number of signs in town. And then there is the issue of locating the sign within the right-of-way. If it is within Highway 81 right-of-way it would require permission from Georgia DOT.

After further discussion Mr. Henderson said that he would withdraw the application. He and Pastor Roberts would look into another way to get the sign approved.

Mr. Wearing noted that the Planning Commission understood and sympathized with their situation.

Oxford College Demolition Permit Request - Oxford College has submitted a development permit application for the demolition of the house at 604 Emory Street. Mr. Eady asked Ms. Mayfield to summarize the situation. She noted that the original intent was to restore this house. The College had abated the asbestos and then through one delay or another the house has deteriorated and is now mold infested and unusable. The college has determined it is best to demolish it.

Mr. Eady asked what the plan was for the eventual use of the land. Ms. Mayfield replied that in the short term it will be green space. The area where the house will be torn down will be seeded with grass.

Mr. Manson reminded the College that any building located on the site will have to be of a residential character.

Mr. Eady wanted it placed in the record that Emory University at the main campus is now a client of his so in most cases involving the University and the College he will abstain.

Mr. Wearing asked if it had been determined that the current status of the house is unsafe. Ms. Mayfield replied that it is. The plan is to have it torn down very soon.

Upon motion of Mr. Wearing, seconded by Ms. England the request for the development permit to permit the demolition of the house at 604 Emory Street was approved as submitted. The vote was three in favor with Mr. Eady abstaining.

Mr. Eady asked Ms. Mayfield if she could give the Planning Commission an overview of future construction projects. She said they were concentrating on building the dining hall. In addition, soon they would be starting on the renovation of the Pierce Science Building.

PLANNING COMMISSION TRAINING – Mr. Wearing gave a short report on the planning commission training he had attended in Athens. There were 60 people from all over the state and he learned a lot.

CHAIR'S COMMENTS – Before adjourning the meeting, Mr. Eady suggested to the members that it would be a good idea for them to review the sections of the Zoning Ordinance that apply to each application before each meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: Mr. Eady adjourned the meeting at 7:40 PM.

Submitted by:

Bob Schwartz, zoning administrator