

Oxford Planning Commission
Minutes for Meeting on September 11, 2012

Attendance: Patsy Burke, Jackie Ellis, Vivian Harris, Erik Oliver, Ron Manson, Jim Patrick, and David Eady (Liaison)

Guests: Dean Stephen Bowen, Margaret Dugan and Dr. Michael McQuaide (Oxford College)

Chairman Erik Oliver opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

Old Business:

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

New Business:

1. 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. This request was subsequently amended as a request to rezone from R-20 to Agricultural. The Planning Commission considered this request utilizing the criteria established in Article X – Zoning Amendments and Applications; Section 40-1003 of the Oxford Zoning Ordinance. The results of the analysis follow:
 - a. *Whether the proposal will permit a use that is suitable in view of the use and development of adjacent and nearby property.* - The use of this property as an organic farm is not significantly different from its historical use (The Elizers used it for gardening, cows, horses, and hay). Therefore, the proposed use would have relatively little additional impact on the adjacent residential and undeveloped properties adjacent to it.
 - b. *Whether the proposal will adversely affect the existing use or usability of adjacent or nearby properties.* - This proposal would not adversely affect the adjacent property for reasons stated in Paragraph a.
 - c. *Whether the property to be affected by the proposal has a reasonable economic use as currently zoned.* – The property has a reasonable economical use as a single-family residential property (that which it has been for decades). Development of an organic farm is considered to be a greater economic use.
 - d. *Whether the proposal will result in a use, which will or could cause an excessive or burdensome use of existing streets, transportation facilities, utilities, or schools.* – The proposed use would have less impact than development under the property’s current zoning (R-20). The impact of additional pedestrian and vehicular traffic would be minimal. The primary concern raised by the Planning Commission was the safety of the students crossing Emory Street to access the property. It was suggested that the college consider working with the city and GADOT to install a pedestrian activated traffic signal at Hammill and Emory Street (or Moore and Emory Streets) to insure safe crossing.
 - e. *Whether the proposal is in conformity with the policy and intent of the comprehensive plan including the future development map and future land use plan map.* – The comprehensive plan for future development called for development of a town core with population density decreasing with distance from the town center. While an organic farm would not conform to the current comprehensive plan, the commission recognizes that the city cannot force the owner (now the college) to develop the property with housing. The college has no intention of building homes there in the foreseeable future. The property could remain R-20 with only the one single-family home on it, but the commission believes the proposed agricultural use would benefit the town center (through sales at a farmer’s market), and draw positive attention to the community. Therefore, recognizing the current economic climate does not favor development of the property with additional residences, the benefits of the proposal to the town center and community as a whole are considered to outweigh any negative aspects of the proposal.

- f. *Whether there are other existing or changing conditions affecting the use and development of the property, which give supporting grounds for either approval or disapproval of the proposal.* – Planning Commission members questioned the impact of the proposal on future establishment of interconnecting roads between neighborhoods to reduce necessity of traveling on Emory Street. It was pointed out that this concept never considered development of the roadways farther south than the Wentworth Subdivision. As far as impacts on adjacent neighborhoods are considered, it was felt that development, as an organic farm would have less impact than a residential development. The college stated it would be sensitive to the adjacent neighbors in developing the infrastructure required for their operation. A commission member expressed a possible interest of citizens attending organic farming classes at the farm. This possibility along with the selling of organic produce in the town center was considered positive grounds for approval of the proposal.
- g. *Whether the proposal would create an isolated zoning district unrelated to adjacent and nearby districts.* The proposal would create an isolated zoning district under the current comprehensive plan. However, the effective use would not be significantly different than its historic use.
- h. *Whether the proposal would have an impact on the environment, including but not limited to, drainage, soil erosion and sedimentation, flooding, air quality and water quality.* –The development of the property as an organic farm requires the owner to be environmentally conscious to maintain its certification as an organic farm. The college is aware that part of the property is in a flood plain and that drainage issues exist that must be handled to successfully develop the property. The college stated it planned to add no new concrete or hard surfaces. It plans to retain consultants to guide them in the development of the property in an environmental way. Also development of the property as an organic farm is considered less impactful environmentally than development as a residential area.

The Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council approve this application for rezoning from R-20 to Agricultural.

2. Chairman Oliver reported that he and David Eady had reviewed the sign issue raised at the last Planning Commission meeting and had discovered that the definition of “Directional Signs” in the code allows directional signs to be permitted by the city on city rights-of-way. The commission thus permitted the existing directional signs erected by the college with the caveat that none be placed in such a way as to block views of oncoming pedestrian or vehicular traffic at intersections. Three signs still require action by the college; the Conferencing and Special Events sign at Hammill Street must be removed from the Hammill Street right-of-way (at least 33 feet from the center line of the street), the East Village sign must be removed from the Haygood Street right-of-way (at least 25 feet from the centerline, and the Directory sign at Haygood Street, if confirmed to be in the right-of-way, must be moved at least 25 feet from the centerline. The Planning Commission asked the college to proceed with moving the signs and report back at the next commission meeting.

Chairman Oliver adjourned the meeting at 7:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Jim Patrick, Secretary

