



**MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2023 – 6:30 PM
CITY HALL**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

David Eady - Mayor
George Holt – Councilmember
Jim Windham – Councilmember
Laura McCanless – Councilmember
Mike Ready – Councilmember
Jeff Wearing – Councilmember
Erik Oliver – Councilmember

STAFF PRESENT:

Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Bill Andrew – City Manager
Mark Anglin – Police Chief
Jody Reid – Supervisor of Maintenance
Sydney Chacon – Associate Clerk
Matt Brown – Maintenance Staff
Austin Ballard – Maintenance Staff
Kole Houston – Maintenance Staff
Charlie Mathis – Maintenance Staff
Johnny Usher – Maintenance Staff

OTHERS PRESENT: Laura Gafnea (Oxford College), Sam Trager (CVIOG), Jonathan Eady, family of Austin Ballard

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor’s Announcements

Announcements are listed in the agenda. Regarding the possible special called meeting, Mayor Eady asked Marcia Brooks to find out from Rushton if they could have the proposed budget amendments ready for a meeting Thursday night. They confirmed they could, so a meeting was planned for 6:30 via Zoom.

Mayor Eady announced that he would like to close the office at noon on Friday, December 22nd and place the Maintenance staff on call. There were no objections from City Council members.

Mayor Eady presented a 5-year faithful service award to Austin Ballard.

2. Committee Reports

a. **Trees, Parks, and Recreation Board** – No report.

- b. **Planning Commission** – Bill Andrew stated there is someone considering requesting annexation/rezoning on Moore Street. There is also an issue pending regarding Richardson Street. Jonathan Eady reported that the two ordinances the City Council will review in January pertain to violations occurring now in the City and are not merely prohibiting future issues.
 - c. **Sustainability Committee** – Laura McCanless reported that the committee is working on their agenda for next year.
 - d. **Old Church Venue Committee** – Mike Ready reported that a RFP had been released generating interest from three companies. The committee is in the process of vetting the proposals and hope to make a presentation with more details in January.
3. **Review of a Classification and Compensation Plan for the City of Oxford, Georgia, by Carl Vinson Institute of Georgia** (Attachment B)
Sam Trager with CVIOG presented the findings and recommendations of their report to the City Council.

George Holt stated that he does not agree with the assessment that the Supervisor of Utilities and Maintenance position should be classified as a non-exempt position. He contends that there are several exemptions under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), and this position is exempt under at least one of the exemptions.

Mayor Eady stated that he plans to appoint a committee to evaluate the report and discussion and make recommendations to the City Council. Mr. Trager stated that he recommends having an attorney review this issue to protect the interests of the City.

Mayor Eady appointed a committee to review the report in consultation with CVIOG and return to the City Council with recommendations. He requested that George Holt, Jeff Wearing, and Mike Ready serve on the committee. Bill Andrew pointed out that the contractual obligation with CVIOG has ended, and a new contract would need to be executed to continue working with them. George Holt stated he does not believe they need to consult with CVIOG further. Mayor Eady stated it could be the committee's decision whether further consultation with CVIOG is needed. Mr. Holt requested copies of the new job descriptions from Bill Andrew.

4. **Oxford DDA Partnership Effort With Main Street Land & Properties**

Jonathan Eady spoke on the DDA's vote at their recent meeting to select Main Street Land & Properties as a potential developer.

He stated that the next steps are:

1. The City Council moving forward with the Whatcoat Street realignment
2. Conveyance of the property to the DDA
3. Settle unresolved issues with the developer regarding rent and schematic design
4. Move forward with negotiation of transaction documents with the developer

Mayor Eady asked for clarification on when the milestones of the Whatcoat Street realignment should be completed in relation to development of the site. Jonathan Eady stated that the expectation is for the Whatcoat Street contractor to coordinate with the development contractor to ensure that timing of the various elements of the Whatcoat Street project are completed once and do not have to be ripped out and reworked.

Jim Windham stated it was his understanding that hard cost estimates would be available a couple of weeks ago. Jeff Wearing agreed with Mr. Windham.

Mayor Eady stated the only way to get firm cost estimates is to release a RFP. Laura McCanless stated what she recalled is that it would take a couple of weeks to get bid documents out to potential contractors for the work, and ninety days to complete the bid process. Jeff Wearing stated that was his recollection also.

Mr. Windham asked how much control the DDA will have over the project as it proceeds. Jonathan Eady stated the ground lease document would enforce control in the long term and regulate changes during development. During development they would have control over design. Before the ground lease is signed a final set of plans must be approved. Any changes after that must be approved.

Mr. Windham asked if it is necessary to tear down the existing building. Jonathan Eady stated that while the existing building is not about to fall down, it does not accommodate the kind of development they are pursuing to build the town center.

Jeff Wearing stated he did not know if he could support a \$1-2 million dollar price tag.

Mayor Eady stated that what the DDA really needs is a delineated boundary and establishment of a lot that could be conveyed to the DDA. That is tied to the Whatcoat Street work.

Jeff Wearing stated he was under the impression that no additional parking was needed for the development, but now additional parking spaces on Whatcoat Street are being contemplated.

Jonathan Eady stated that there is no pending expectation that additional parking will need to be provided by the City. However, before the visioning and concept plan transitions to executable documents, the DDA wants to be absolutely certain that what is proposed will meet the developer's expectations.

Erik Oliver asked why this process is being handled differently than DDA processes are usually handled. Specifically, a DDA is usually conveyed property after which they go out and find financing and a developer. He also questioned the value of the project to citizens and the jurisdiction granted to the DDA for developing the town center. He was told that they were given the town green for phase 1 of development.

Mayor Eady stated the DDA was given jurisdiction of the whole town center area, which runs from the old city hall building to the current city hall building, and the property on E. Clark Street and behind Orna Villa. The DDA was directed to look at the E. Clark Street property and the property behind Orna Villa for residential development, which did not come to fruition. This was the only directive from the City Council.

Jonathan Eady stated the scope of Oxford's DDA is to leverage its ability to be more flexible than traditional city governments to obtain financing and attract developers.

Mr. Oliver stated several concerns:

- Construction before deconstruction would require acquisition of a parcel further north.

- Realignment of Whatcoat Street for the purpose of accommodating the development is outside the scope of the Whatcoat Street improvements, which were being discussed before the DDA was formed.
- Why not start with a project that would not be a cost to the citizens such as work on the green?
- The building will be pre-leased to Oxford College. His concern is the college will eventually have the opportunity to buy it from the developer.
- The lease does not have to be with the DDA. The City Council could retain ownership of the property and be the lessor.

Mayor Eady stated that the City cannot enter into the type of agreement being planned.

Erik Oliver stated he does not see how the contemplated building would be any different than the City leasing the current building to Oxford College. He also asked how the City will receive remuneration for the loss of the current building.

Jonathan Eady stated that the only thing the City is being asked to spend money on is infrastructure on Whatcoat Street, which is a predicate to this particular project being done but has been on the drawing board for a decade or longer and is consistent with aligning the streets in a way to facilitate town center redevelopment independent of the current project being discussed.

Mayor Eady provided the income estimates again that he had previously provided related to the project.

Jonathan Eady stated that the DDA has spent a lot of time getting to this point with the project, and it is aligned with their understanding of the City Council's expectations and direction for the Town Center. If the City Council wants them to move forward, they will. If the City Council does not want to see this happen, they will stop meeting.

Erik Oliver stated that some of the City Council members felt the development plans were shoved and the DDA is saying that they will not work on any other ideas for Town Center development. He stated that the City Council is still the deciding body.

Mayor Eady stated that what he heard Jonathan Eady say and what he heard from Brian Barnard in a previous meeting is that the DDA is continuing to move forward in good faith based on their understanding of the City Council's desires and has requested the City's direction at certain stages in the process. In March the City Council approved them moving forward with the plan to engage with Main Street concerning construction of this building. If the City Council does not want the DDA to move forward with building according to this plan they will stop meeting with Main Street and stop working on this project.

Mr. Oliver asked about the status of discussions the City Council has had about cost sharing, compensation for the building coming down, and a property swap and whether they have been discussed with Main Street. Mayor Eady stated he has mentioned the property swap to Main Street. He stated he does not see the value of a property swap because the City will be swapping one building that is not sufficient for moving forward with the DDA's vision for another one. In conversations with Sam Hay, he has discussed removing the existing post office building and

Repurposing the site into something in line with town center goals. Jonathan Eady added that one of the advantages of partnering with Main Street is the opportunity to add on to the town center using the post office property.

Mr. Oliver stated that in that case he would support Main Street purchasing the old city hall building. Jonathan Eady stated that there is an overall project cost that if it is exceeded makes it a non-viable project. Piling more non-revenue producing cost onto the project does not make it a better project. Mr. Oliver stated he does not think they will walk away if they have to pay for the building.

Laura McCanless stated she supports Main Street's project in its current proposed location but would like to see some financial support from Main Street or Oxford College for the realignment of Whatcoat Street. Mayor Eady stated he has shared that concern with Emory and they have taken it back to discuss.

Mike Ready expressed his support for the DDA proposal. He is getting tired of the City Council rehashing issues over and over. He acknowledges that he is concerned with the cost of the Whatcoat Street realignment and the loss of the property, but he believes the City Council needs to approve moving forward.

George Holt stated he supported the project when it first started out, but then found out the building was going to be torn down. He did not agree with this, but also feels that Main Street should contribute toward the cost of the Whatcoat Street realignment.

Jonathan Eady stated his belief that 95% of the increase in cost for Whatcoat Street is due to escalating construction costs. There should be no increase in cost to realign the street. This part of the project has been discussed since 2006. It is not specifically in the project to facilitate construction of the building. Realignment of the street is not required to build the building, but the DDA feels that realignment and squaring the property will maximize the utility for a building site.

Jim Windham stated that originally the cost to make changes to Whatcoat Street was \$80,000. It became \$300,000 when the idea of realignment was introduced. He stated he has a hard time justifying spending \$1 million or more on Whatcoat Street. He supports the DDA and believes there are so many possibilities to improve the green and the area behind Yarbrough House. His main goal with the Whatcoat Street work was to get rid of some asphalt.

Mr. Oliver stated that there should be more cost sharing with the college and the developer benefitting. He cannot support spending so much money when there are so many other infrastructure needs in the City.

Mayor Eady stated that Atkins will be moving forward with bidding procedures. They can also be asked to evaluate doing minimal work on Whatcoat Street just to get rid of some pavement and redefine the lot and provide this information to Oxford.

5. Review the City Council Meeting Schedule for 2024 (Attachment C)

There were no objections to adopting the calendar. Mayor Eady announced that beginning in 2024, a committee of City Council will be planning the Staff Appreciation Party. He and his wife are working on getting a volunteer appreciation dinner scheduled.

6. Review of recommended changes to the Stream Buffers from 25 feet to 100 feet (Attachment D)

Laura McCanless clarified that the proposed ordinance change does not include intermittent streams.

George Holt asked for the rationale for the change. Laura McCanless explained that there is not appreciable effectiveness until the distance approaches 75-100 feet from a building site. The EPA advocates a minimum of 100 feet but recommends more. She added that this applies to new development.

7. Review Three Bids for Public Works Fence Demolition and Replacement (Attachment E)

Laura McCanless asked if the City is familiar with HCS. Jody Reid advised they do a lot of the City's work and are reliable.

George Holt asked why the second bidder included tax on labor in their quote. Marcia Brooks stated the City does not pay tax on any part of the cost of a job.

Jody confirmed that all the bids are using treated wood.

The Council members agreed to move forward with the HCS bid.

8. Authorization for Mayor Eady to sign the official Proclamation declaring Newton County as an Education First Community (Attachment F)

9. Consideration of Placing Signs for Catova Creek where it flows under E. Soule Street and E. Richardson Street

10. Approval of Request for Assistance from Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) to apply for the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant (Attachment G)

11. Appointment of the Mayor Pro Tem

The City Council members agreed that Erik Oliver should serve as Mayor Pro Tem in 2024.

12. Appointment of City Solicitor, City Attorney, and Municipal Court Judge

George Holt stated that the City charter also requires appointment of the City Clerk and Police Chief, and the Council can also choose to appoint a Treasurer in January of each year. The City Council will discuss these appointments in Executive Session this evening.

13. City Road Signs Update – compliance with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)

14. Distribution of FEMA Reimbursement Funds (Appendix H)

The City Council advised staff to leave the FEMA Reimbursement Funds in the General Fund to help offset the deficit in the budget.

15. Other Business

16. Work Session Meeting Review

17. **Executive Session**

Jim Windham made a motion to go into Executive Session at 8:47 p.m. Mike Ready seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

An Executive Session was held to discuss personnel matters.

Jim Windham made a motion to exit Executive Session at 9:00 p.m. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

18. **Adjourn**

Jim Windham made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 p.m. Erik Oliver seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer