



**MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, JULY 17, 2023 – 6:30 PM
CITY HALL**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

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

STAFF PRESENT:

Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Bill Andrew – City Manager
Mark Anglin – Police Chief
Jody Reid – Utilities/Maintenance
Superintendent

ELECTED OFFICIALS NOT PRESENT:

Erik Oliver – Councilmember

OTHERS PRESENT: Art Vinson, Laurie Vinson, Laura Gafnea (Oxford College), Mike McQuaide, Pat Hutchinson and Jamie Porges (Peak Solarworks)

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. **Mayor’s Announcements**
2. **Committee Reports**
 - a. **Trees, Parks, and Recreation Board** – No report.
 - b. **Planning Commission** – Bill Andrew provided the report.
 - c. **Downtown Development Authority (DDA)** – Mike Ready provided the report.
 - d. **Sustainability Committee** – No report.
3. **Review of the 2 MW Solar Electric Generation Plant Proposals from Cherry Street, Inman Solar, and Peak Solarworks** (Attachment B)
Mayor Eady summarized the issue: This project would connect the solar power generated to our distribution lines but not to transmission lines, so the power generated would stay within the City of Oxford. Two locations are being considered. One location is close to the substation, and the other location is the Whelchel property owned by Oxford College on the north side of Oxford. The optimal connection point is the corner

of West Richardson St. and Wesley St, which would allow the north and south circuits to be connected. A commitment from Oxford College is needed to utilize the Whelchel property, however, this cannot be completed until the new Dean comes on board. The City of Oxford requested proposals from the three companies named.

Jim Windham stated that the three proposals were very different, making it difficult to compare them. He did find the alternative location of Geiger Street (proposed by Cherry Street) to be an interesting idea. He stated that Cherry Street brought up environmental impact site assessment while the other two did not. Mayor Eady stated that a Level 1 environmental site review has been completed.

Mr. Windham stated that he is very concerned about the loss of trees in Oxford and is concerned with how many trees would be taken out at either of the proposed sites.

Mayor Eady summarized the forecast from MEAG for the next ten years for Oxford. In 2023 and 2024 Oxford does not have enough capacity to meet its minimum requirements. Once the new solar project goes online that Oxford has already agreed to participate in, there will be just enough capacity for a couple of years, then further out there will not be enough capacity. There are also uncertainties with Plant Scherer that may further reduce Oxford's available capacity. This is why the 2 MW project being discussed is so important. It will give Oxford a surplus, but the City should easily be able to sell that surplus on the market.

Laura McCanless asked if Cherry Street and Peak Solarworks could address the Geiger Street property as an alternative site. Mayor Eady stated that the Whelchel property qualifies for REAP grant assistance, which figures heavily into the Cherry Street and Peak Solarworks proposals. The Geiger Street property is not eligible for this assistance. The City also does not have a good feel for the willingness of the Newton County Board of Education to help with the Geiger Street property.

Ms. McCanless stated she shares Mr. Windham's concern about taking out trees, given the City's sustainability goals. Mayor Eady stated there is no other cleared space in Oxford that could be used for this purpose. Mr. Windham stated there are privately owned properties near Oxford, and also suggested using the cemetery for solar panels.

Mike Ready asked what MEAG's plan for replacement of Scherer. Mayor Eady stated they will be putting out a new Integrated Resource Plan this year that will have to address Scherer. Mr. Ready also asked how Oxford will deal with additional demand in the future. Mayor Eady acknowledged that Oxford has been approached by developers but the land in question is not in Oxford's electric service area. He believes it is more likely that industrial growth could occur. He does not believe the areas within the Oxford service area subject to residential growth will put Oxford in the negative for capacity.

Laura McCanless recommended that properties adjacent to Oxford be checked for suitability without impact to trees as Mr. Windham suggested.

The bidders were invited to the meeting. Only Peak Solarworks was in attendance. They spoke of the restorative efforts they are willing to make to the property and the maintenance efforts required after the project is implemented.

Mr. Ready mentioned that price should not be the only factor in the decision. Mr. Windham asked how confident Peak Solarworks is about the grant. They advised they have been awarded the grant.

Mayor Eady stated that MEAG is working on 10-year projections with and without the 2 MW solar addition. This information should be ready when a vote is taken in the July regular session.

4. **Governor's Office of Planning and Budget's Improving Neighborhood Outcomes in Disproportionally Impacted Communities Grant for the Bike/Ped Path Update (Attachment C) 1:12**

Mayor Eady explained that after the vote on this issue at the most recent meeting, Bill Andrew spoke to the Director of the division at OPB that manages this grant. Mr. Andrew explained the information he obtained in a memo to the City Council.

In summary, the City can accept the grant without any punitive action if the City later decides not to move forward with it. No check will be cut; the grant is based on reimbursement. Any funds used for engineering or planning can be used toward the grant match. Also, scope changes can be considered as long as the new scope meets the objectives of the grant purpose.

Mr. Andrew distributed a map showing the census tract. The project has to stay within that area. The census tract is from the south side of Soule Street south to the Covington city limits. Mayor Eady proposes that the City accept the Terms and Conditions of the grant and appoint a committee to work with Atkins to identify some alternative trail locations.

Laura McCanless appreciated that the census tract provides opportunities to serve underserved communities further south in the City toward the Covington city limits than they previously believed.

Mayor Eady stated that the new understanding of the census tract area allows for several options for serving underserved communities and for facilitating interconnectivity with other trails.

The City must agree to the Terms and Conditions by midnight tonight to move forward. A consensus is needed tonight to move forward, and a vote will be taken at the next regular session to appoint a committee to work on alternatives. Mr. Andrew has compiled a list of potential committee members and asked for names of anyone else who wishes to participate.

Laura McCanless stated she supports this plan. There were no other concerns raised by other City Councilmembers.

5. Review of July 4th Parade Expenses and Budget (Attachment D)

The City Council reviewed the list of expenses and sources of revenue for the July 4, 2023 July 4th parade.

6. Asbury Street Park Turf Ponding Issues (Attachment E)

During the July 4, 2023 event at Asbury Street Park there was excessive ponding on the turf. However, Jody Reid advised that he forgot to turn off the irrigation equipment before the event, so the ponding was much worse because of that. However, he acknowledged that ponding is a problem. This issue was reviewed more than two years ago and was referred to the Trees, Parks and Recreation Board for recommendations.

Laura McCanless stated there are a number of sustainable methods to make the turf drain water more naturally, including allowing beneficial bugs and microbes to be in the soil. She suggested reaching out to the State Botanical Garden for assistance and advice. Jim Windham also suggested speaking to Daniel Parson at Oxford College Farm.

Mayor Eady recommended that Bill Andrew re-engage the Board on this issue and ask them for some recommendations to correct the problem. Marcia Brooks stated that as long as the expense is \$5,000 or more, it can be considered a capital improvement and therefore can be paid for from SPLOST funds. The City Council agreed that the problem should be corrected for the long term even if the cost is higher, and not spend money that may not correct the problem.

7. Invoices paid for \$1,000 or more in June 2023 (Attachment F)

No discussion.

8. Other Business

Bill Andrew provided updates on the CDBG 2021 grant work and the sidewalk project. A discussion was held about pros and cons of various light poles for the sidewalk project.

Jim Windham suggested having an app created for the City of Oxford to communicate information to residents.

Jody Reid stated that the new city limit signs will be up in the next few days. Bill Andrew provided some details on the placement of the signs in relation to issues with easement and rights-of-way.

Jody Reid provided feedback on the electric mowers they tried out. Based on their experience, he does not recommend purchasing one at this time.

9. Work Session Meeting Review

10. Executive Session

No Executive Session was held.

11. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by Mayor Eady at 8:39 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia Brooks



City Clerk/Treasurer