



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 2024 – 6:30 PM
CITY HALL**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

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

STAFF PRESENT:

Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Bill Andrew – City Manager
Mark Anglin – Police Chief
Jody Reid – Supervisor of Maintenance and
Utilities
David Strickland – City Attorney

ELECTED OFFICIALS NOT PRESENT:

Erik Oliver – Councilmember

OTHERS PRESENT: None.

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor’s Announcements

2. Committee Reports

- a. **Trees, Parks, and Recreation Board** – Laura McCanless provided the report. She reported that Susan Ballard would like to return to the Board. This can be voted on at the next meeting if the City Council agrees. No concerns were expressed.
- b. **Planning Commission** – Bill Andrew advised there are no issues other than code enforcement to discuss.
- c. **Downtown Development Authority** – Bill Andrew provided the report, giving updates on the Whatcoat development. He also proposed hiring someone to develop a working budget for rehabbing the Yarbrough House. Main Street Properties is interested in funding the cost of developing this budget.
- d. **Sustainability Committee** – Laura McCanless provided the report, giving feedback on student volunteer opportunities with Oxford College and plans for next school year.

Jim Windham requested an amendment to the agenda. He asked for an update on the theft of Oxford City Limit signs. Bill Andrew provided the update. He advised the current plan is to install

air tags in them when they are reinstalled.

Bill Andrew provided an update at Mayor Eady's request on an application to Senator Ossoff's office for another federal earmark for construction of the Catova Creek trail.

3. **Preliminary Review of Whatcoat Street bids** (Attachment B)

The lowest overall bid was received from Peach State Construction. Atkins Realis advised the City to consider current or past experience with vendors when reviewing bids. Mr. Andrew stated that while there have been some issues with Peach State on their current project with the City of Oxford, he feels that the quality of their work is good. There are some issues that will need to be corrected.

Jim Windham stated that he does not think the dirt was packed adequately and the new sidewalks will crack quickly.

Mr. Andrew stated that they also embedded mailboxes in concrete when putting them back, which is not supposed to be done.

Mayor Eady suggested speaking with Atkins Realis about the compacting concerns and putting Peach State on notice that if the sidewalk cracks prematurely the City will be expecting it to be addressed.

George Holt asked if any of the other contractors that placed bids have been associated in the past with Oxford. They have not.

Laura McCanless expressed her preference for selecting a local bidder.

The point was made by George Holt that some of the issues with the current sidewalk project would not be relevant to this project.

It was confirmed that the lighting plan for this project should be the same as the one used for the current sidewalk project.

4. **Routine Electric Utility Pole Replacement** (Appendix C)

George Holt asked if Oxford has any experience with any of the vendors. Jody Reid advised that both U-Tec and Over and Under had done good work for Oxford in the past.

Mr. Holt also asked why there is such a variance in price for materials between the vendors. Mr. Reid stated that Anixter will not price a transformer unless it's ordered. Their bid also does not include poles. Gresco's quote does include both transformers and poles. This is the main difference between the bids.

The recommendation is to go with U-Tec for installation and Gresco for supplies, poles and transformers.

5. **Review of Rights of Way Encroachment** (Attachment D)

Erik Oliver requested that the City Council discuss this issue. There are a number of instances of private property encroachments on City rights-of-way.

David Strickland suggested at a minimum disclosing this information to all affected property owners and recording the information in official property records as part of the deed. The City could take it one step further and require each property owner to sign an agreement that could also be filed with official property records.

Mayor Eady stated there may be some equity issues with trying to distinguish between different types of encroachments for the purpose of deciding how to handle them. He expressed concern about requiring certain property owners to remove encroachments and allowing other property owners to let theirs remain. George Holt agreed this is a concern for him as well.

In the past, the church on Richardson Street had approached the City Council about deeding the part of their property that is in the right of way to them so they could sell it. The City Council declined to do so. Bill Andrew suggested to them that a conditional use permit could be issued that would remain in effect as long as the use of the property did not change and could be renewable every three years.

David Strickland asked if the City has a global understanding of where the encroachments are and if all have been identified. Mayor Eady stated that Jordan Engineering performed extensive research when they were working on the right-of-way survey project, and he feels confident that all encroachments were identified as part of that process. The City has the maps that were generated as part of the project showing these encroachments.

Laura McCanless stated that the City Council should vote to move forward with sending the property owners letters at the next regular session. Mr. Andrew stated the staff time to do this would be tremendous.

David Strickland suggested it could be done in phases as situations change with specific properties rather than doing them all at once. Mayor Eady stated he would rather focus on the encroachments that are actual buildings first if there is some kind of attempt to triage properties.

Jim Windham stated that doing this work piecemeal is a bad idea. He recommended paying David Strickland and Jordan Engineering to complete the full process all at once. Jeff Wearing does not think all of it can be done at once because each situation is different.

David Strickland stated title searches would be needed. This may have been done to some extent with the right-of-way survey. There is also a gratuity concern. The City may want to charge for the licenses to address this issue, even if it is a de minimis amount.

Mayor Eady asked Mr. Strickland if he could give the City an order of magnitude of the cost to complete this process. It should not be considered as part of Mr. Strickland's regular compensation but should be in addition to that. Mr. Strickland advised he would check with Robert Jordan first to avoid doing rework that is not necessary.

The City Council discussed several issues related to encroachment and parking issues at Oxford College. Mayor Eady asked Bill Andrew to discuss these issues with the appropriate individual(s) there.

Mr. Windham advised that fences should be brought up to code (i.e. moved off of the right of way) when they are repaired or replaced. The City would also retain the right to remove a fence if needed for official purposes.

6. **Charter Changes** (Attachment E)

David Strickland explained that the changes to City Manager duties are to clarify that all City employees, including the Police Chief report to the City Manager.

George Holt brought up that somewhere it says that the City Council cannot interfere with employees supervised by the City Manager. But it also says in Article III, Section 2B that the City Clerk shall perform such other duties as may be required by the City Council. One of the proposed changes is to add "and as supervised by the City Manager," at the end of this sentence. George Holt suggested removing the existing sentence instead to minimize conflicting language.

Marcia Brooks requested an adjustment to remove the Municipal Court from her direct supervision and responsibility. This is probably in an ordinance. The City can look at the ordinances once the charter update is completed.

This charter update will require a resolution and two reads to become official.

Mayor Eady stated that the alcohol restriction in the City charter was added in 1914 in response to the State's adoption of Prohibition laws. He recommends striking this language because further along in the Charter, it states the City can regulate the sale, transport, etc. of alcohol.

Jim Windham recommended requiring that alcohol be served with a meal to keep package stores out of the City. Bill Andrew stated that this goal could be achieved by not allowing package sales. David Strickland stated that the City needs to decide what it wants to allow, and he can update the ordinances accordingly. Mr. Windham also recommended prohibiting the sale of alcohol between certain hours.

Laura McCanless mentioned that the City Council may also wish to define where drinking can occur both on and off premises of a restaurant or other business.

The vote in June will be for striking the language in the charter prohibiting the sale of alcohol. The ordinance changes will come after the City Councilmembers decide what to allow.

7. **Code Enforcement** (Attachment F)

The City Council reviewed the list of current code enforcement concerns. Chief Anglin described the process for citing and prosecution of these violations.

8. **Video Cameras at Asbury Street Park** (Attachment G)

Chief Anglin presented information about quotes he obtained for new cameras for Asbury Street Park. The cameras that are currently installed do not provide the functionality that was promised by Viper Security. David Strickland requested copies of the contract and all other documents

related to the purchase so he can review them to determine if the City has any recourse in this matter.

Two quotes were obtained. The quote from Flock is \$24,000 for storage/access for eight cameras. The Verkada quote is an equipment purchase with a small maintenance fee each year. Verkada is a new company. Covington-Newton County E-911 uses this equipment to monitor a tower site.

The current budget includes \$24,000 in licensing costs for these cameras in the Operating budget. Purchasing the equipment could help reduce the Operating budget deficit for FY 2025. However, since Verkada is a new company, the cameras are not as proven as the Flock cameras are. There was a question as to whether SPLOST money could be used for the storage/access fee.

9. **Review of FY 2025 Budget as Presented in the Public Hearing** (Attachment H)

Mayor Eady gave a recap of the discussion during the Public Hearing, including his recommendation to increase Property Tax revenue by the amount of the operating budget deficit and adjust the millage rate if needed to meet this need when the 2024 property tax digest is received in late June from the Newton County Tax Commissioner.

If the millage rate has to be increased to cover the full deficit amount, it will be an increase from 5.444 mils to about 6.9 mils. If this recommendation is not accepted, another way will have to be determined to cover the deficit since it is required by State law that the City Council adopt a balanced Operating budget. One other option is to adjust the assumption of how much revenue is expected from LOST collections. The current prediction is somewhat conservative due to generally lower revenue forecasts.

Marcia Brooks stated that the new software is going to be fantastic. But she does not think the software is going to help with separation of duties. This factor has been a problem for several years in Oxford's audits. Mayor Eady stated that one possible option to help with this problem that was discussed was having external accountants review the documentation. However, it seems odd to him not to have that approval take place internally. Ms. Brooks stated that it is also very time-consuming to send the documents related to reconciliation to the accountants.

George Holt stated he thought there would be someone reviewing the City's processes. Ms. Brooks stated that someone from the City of Covington had come and reviewed their current processes. She stated that she could come back after the new software is installed.

Mr. Windham stated he is not against hiring another person but does think the City should wait until the new software is fully installed and operating.

Mayor Eady stated that we need to do whatever is necessary to get invoices caught up. He thinks that means another person needs to be hired, even if they are fired later during the year.

Ms. Brooks stated that she is willing to concede a full-time position and hire a part-time person because she feels it is needed so badly.

Mike Ready stated that a full-time position is needed for this role. It will take at least sixty days to hire someone. He observed that there is a lot of concern about a 1.5 mil increase that probably

will not materialize because property values have gone so high. His recommendation is to keep the positions in the budget.

Mayor Eady added that the budget can be amended before the positions are filled if the actual property tax figures are drastically different from what is expected.

Jeff Wearing expressed support for increasing property tax revenue to cover the deficit. He believes there will be adequate revenue to cover the deficit.

Ms. Brooks added that each year the City Council passes a budget with plans to transfer several hundred thousand dollars to the General Fund to make it whole, but that has not been necessary for several years.

Mr. Holt recommended increasing other revenue line items to avoid putting the entire amount in property tax revenue. He suggested adding some of it to LOST revenue.

Mr. Windham stated if property taxes are increased, electric rates should be decreased if it has not been necessary to transfer surplus revenue. Mayor Eady agreed with making the General Fund support itself in principle.

10. Other Business

11. Work Session Meeting Review

12. Executive Session

Jim Windham made a motion to enter Executive Session at 9:42 p.m. to discuss real estate matters. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).

Jim Windham made a motion to exit Executive Session at 9:58 p.m. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).

13. Adjourn

Mayor Eady adjourned the meeting at 9:58 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer