



**MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 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

OTHERS PRESENT: Laura Gafnea (Oxford College), Art Vinson, Laurie Vinson, Nick Cole, Brian Barnard

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor’s Announcements

Mayor Eady introduced the new Dean of Oxford College, Badia Ahad. She spoke briefly to those in attendance. Mayor Eady announced that the November regular session meeting will be moved from November 6 to November 13 due to an election in the Council chamber on November 7. Mayor Eady also announced the awarding of a grant to the City of Oxford to plant trees in Longstreet subdivision. Laura McCanless recognized the City arborist, Beryl Budd, and Bill Andrew and Jody Reid for their work to obtain the grant.

2. Committee Reports

- a. **Trees, Parks, and Recreation Board** – Laura McCanless provided the report.
- b. **Sustainability Committee** – There was no report.
- c. **Downtown Development Authority (DDA)** – Brian Barnard provided the report.
- d. **Planning Commission** – Bill Andrew provided the report.

3. **C-Town Bikes Request to Host First Annual Velo Futura** (Attachment B)

Mayor Eady and Bill Andrew reviewed the request to host this event in 2024 at Asbury Street Park along with a health fair. They also would like to use the city green. It was mentioned that the Oxford Lions Club's annual yard sale is usually held on the same day on the city green, and that conflict will need to be resolved. There is also the matter of the revenue loss due to inability to rent the pavilion.

Erik Oliver, Jim Windham, Jeff Wearing and Laura McCanless expressed their support for the event.

Mayor Eady expressed his appreciation to Chief Anglin and the Oxford Police Department for the success of the Faith and Blue event on October 7th.

4. **Bicycle Friendly Community Designation from American League of American Bicyclists** (Attachment C)

Bill Andrew explained that the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) will provide services for completing the application on the city's behalf at no charge. Applications are due in June. While June 2024 may be too soon to submit a meaningful application, the city can at least start laying the groundwork for an application in 2025.

Mr. Andrew spoke with John Divine's Chief of Staff at NEGRC, and she advised that applying for the designation is a lot of hard work. There are other ways to promote a bicycle/pedestrian friendly community besides applying for this designation. However, NEGRC will support the City of Oxford regardless of the direction chosen.

Laura McCanless expressed concerns about financial outlays necessary to achieve the designation. She feels that a cost-benefit analysis should be undertaken.

Mr. Andrew acknowledged Ms. McCanless's concerns but stated that there are several "low-hanging fruits," efforts that could be accomplished fairly easily whether the application is pursued or not. Ms. McCanless agreed that pursuing such items is a good thing for the community.

Jim Windham stated he sees the designation as a way to focus on the issue and stay focused on it. He believes it would help sway GDOT on some of the issues the City of Oxford has been pushing with them. He understands that the City may not be ready to apply in June 2024 but he feels it's a great opportunity to get started.

Erik Oliver stated that there are local people who can help on this effort without spending a lot of money on consultants. Ms. McCanless stated she does not support hiring a consultant but does support working with NEGRC to get started on some items.

5. **Farmers Market Informational Meeting** (Attachment D)

Bill Andrew advised that a student from Oxford College has been helping focus efforts for the farmer's market. The City of Covington has also been very supportive of Oxford's market as a way to enhance their own market by coordinating specific dates for Covington and Oxford. A community meeting is scheduled for October 26 at 6:30 p.m. to share ideas. All Oxford vendors have been invited. He has also discussed the possibility of a pop-up coffee stand with Lily & Sparrow in Covington. Another idea being floated around is creating a parklet to create a sense of place on the farmer's market grounds.

6. Water Fountain Replacement for Asbury Street Park (Attachment E)

Three of the four fountains at Asbury Street Park are not operational. The City purchased four freeze-proof fountains in November of 2019 which are currently in storage. The installed fountains are frost-proof but not freeze-proof. The City has spent money already repairing them when they froze.

Bill Andrew advised that they currently have one quote for the labor to install the fountains for \$10,000. They are waiting for an additional quote.

The Councilmembers discussed how many should be replaced. They do not feel that the refrigerated ones under the pavilion should be replaced. Three are outside the pavilion. Jim Windham was not in favor of storing the fourth fountain as a reserve because it would deteriorate over time. He feels all four should be installed. The discussion then turned to other locations that a fourth one could be installed. It was understood that water pipes would have to be run to a location that does not currently have one, such as the trail at Old Church.

The consensus was to move forward with installation of the three fountains at Asbury Street Park that are outside the pavilion and defer a decision on the fourth fountain to when a location for installation can be installed. If the total for installation of three fountains is \$10,000 or less, Mr. Andrew can move forward with the lower bid without City Council approval.

7. Resolution for a Sewer Connection Moratorium due to Unknown Sewer Capacity (Attachment F)

Mayor Eady discussed the need for a temporary sewer connection moratorium until the study by Carter & Sloope to make this determination can be completed. There have been several interested developers lately who the City cannot make accurate determinations on as far as sewer capacity. He is proposing a six-month moratorium on new connections. This should give adequate time for the study to be completed. If the study is not completed by then the moratorium could be extended. An exception will have to be carved out in the resolution for anyone qualifying for the reduced price for a tap on Emory Street which expires December 23, 2023.

8. Atkins Task Order for Three Project Items (Attachment G)

The committee discussing the trail grant came up with proposals for which no task orders exist with Atkins. There are also two other initiatives needing analysis.

The three broad project items are:

1. Options for trail grant – conceptual trail planning services
2. Parking at Old Church
3. Landscaping plan for City-owned property

Laura McCanless asked that each be considered separately. Jim Windham asked if there is a valid reason for proposing a 12-foot trail. Bill Andrew advised 12 feet is the standard width for a trail to be safe for pedestrians and bicyclists. Laura McCanless pointed out that this standard is for urban high-capacity trails. Erik Oliver does not feel that the current trail plans need to be built to a 12-foot standard.

Mike Ready asked where the funding for the task orders will come from. Mayor Eady stated the trails work can come from the grant. The other option for paying it is from Capital funds.

Erik Oliver proposed that local individuals could work on the old church parking and the landscaping plan. Mayor Eady stated that Atkins' work would be much more analytically based, and they would help the City ground truth its assumptions. They would also come back with estimates of cost.

The Councilmembers discussed shortening the list for trail options, reducing the total cost. The City Council agreed to eliminate #4 and #5 from the list and ask Atkins to review #1, #2, and #3. Erik Oliver volunteered to measure and draw a parking diagram for Old Church.

Laura McCanless expressed concern about Atkins having expertise with native plants, which the City's ordinances require, regarding a plan for landscaping City properties. Erik Oliver recommended reviewing the charrettes that were conducted before, and also involve the Trees, Parks and Recreation Board in this effort. Mayor Eady stated he has requested a comprehensive landscape plan from the Board for several years and has not received anything. Mr. Windham offered his support for the Atkins firm conducting the landscaping task order. He feels confident of their ability to do this in a way that would be beneficial to Oxford.

George Holt proposed moving forward with a revised request for Task 1 since it's tied to the grant and defer the other two tasks to further discussion at a future work session. Mayor Eady agreed and asked Mr. Andrew to work on getting the revised quote for Task 1.

9. **Whatcoat Street Realignment** (Attachment H)

Mayor Eady spoke first about having a conversation with the DDA and the developer about timing of the work to realign Whatcoat Street to ensure accountability for any damage done during construction and to avoid rework. There should also be a conversation as to what portion of the construction is site development and what portion is infrastructure development. There may be some opportunities for cost sharing. Of the estimate received for the realignment cost, \$300,000 was for resurfacing the road. The base of the road will have to be widened to allow for twenty feet of pavement. Curbing and gutter will have to be added as well. There are some stormwater drainage issues that will have to be addressed. On the south side, the ditch will have to be relocated. For that reason, curb and gutter will be more cost effective for the south side. The City said until about three weeks ago that it would like to continue the parking theme on the north side a little further down. Stormwater drainage will also need to be addressed on the north side.

Laura McCanless asked who would pay for the parking for the new facility and if the developer could share in the cost. Mayor Eady stated that who will pay for specific parts of the project is still up in the air. This will have to be resolved during negotiations.

George Holt stated that for the last seven to eight years the City Council has been discussing making some improvements to Whatcoat Street for the citizens and have not been discussing spending as much as the current estimate. Now that a developer wants to come in and build a building on Whatcoat Street, the City is discussing doing all of the work in the estimate. Most of the time a developer pays for infrastructure improvements.

Mayor Eady stated that the City has been discussing this since 2012. Some plans were provided by Robert Jordan that included the parking features. The City Council could not reach agreement on whether to have sidewalks on both sides, but essentially the only difference from those original plans is the small piece of land added to align the road on both sides of Emory Street. The Capital budget included \$300,000 for improvements as far back as 2017.

Jim Windham stated that before that it was in the budget for \$80,000. His recollection of the plan was to make mostly aesthetic changes.

Mayor Eady stated that the resurfacing and widening were part of Robert Jordan's original plans, and most of the cost was for this work.

Mr. Windham stated that was mostly for aesthetics. His main concern is that the City is losing a building, is spending at least \$700,000, and will end up with nothing. The City will be losing annual revenue on the lease of the current building. The developer will be getting the building, which they will tear down to build another one. They stated that the current building is in good condition, but they do not recommend adding a second floor to it without further foundational studies. He believes the City should build the building and retain ownership of it. However, he does not see the benefit of the project.

Mayor Eady stated that half of the cost is for full depth reclamation and resurfacing of the road. Mr. Holt stated that in the past roads have only been resurfaced, and it should not cost \$300,000 to do that. Mayor Eady stated that was the reason we had the streets throughout the City assessed to determine what kind of work each needed, and the City has \$1.3 million budgeted toward that project during this fiscal year.

Mayor Eady stated that the DDA is talking to Oxford College and a potential developer. The discussion revolves around a land lease for the developer to lease the land for thirty years. This lease may offset the current yearly revenue from leasing the building to Oxford College. As a private asset, the building will be taxed, generating revenue for the City. The building will be around 13,000 square feet of high-quality Class A office space that will pay utilities, generating revenue for the City. These revenue streams combined will more than offset the lost lease revenue. The building and improvements to Whatcoat Street will set a domino effect in motion that will likely kick off with the relocation of the post office to the new building, followed by other new businesses. The development of the Town Center is something that the City Council has said it values.

Erik Oliver stated that the plans being discussed for Whatcoat Street were conceived ten years ago and have been mitigated by other factors and the inability to commit subsequent Councils to previous initiatives. He asked if all the City Council members could have an opportunity to talk directly to Oxford College and to the DDA. He wanted to be able to express to them what he had expressed in individual discussion with Mayor Eady. He stated that everyone wants to see positive development for the Town Center, and it's a matter of tweaking plans and moving forward possibly in a way that some do not agree with.

Mr. Oliver asked Brian Barnard if the old City Hall building would remain in place until after the new building is built. Mr. Barnard responded that the larger portion of the new building is on the footprint of the old building, so the plan is to build part of the building, move into that part, then tear down the old building and replace it with the rest of the new building and a parking lot. Mr. Oliver stated that confirms that the need to move north and create a new footprint out of the existing right-of-way is because the college wants to continue to use the old city hall.

Mayor Eady stated that is not correct. It was always part of the plan but they discussed that it makes sense to use the existing building as long as they can. Mr. Barnard added that Oxford

College has surveyed their need for space and will be utilizing space in the new building that they are currently using all over the campus.

Mr. Oliver stated that since these discussions began, the college has acquired a number of properties on Whatcoat Street, and now owns 80% of the Whatcoat Street corridor. It is known that Oxford College plans to develop the Forney property. Allen Memorial is no longer operating. Every time Emory has done something it is an attribute to the City. There is an Emory standard that would become part of this new area. Every time they have done work they have paid for work on the streets. When the other properties they have purchased are developed, their standard for lampposts, sidewalks, etc., will be applied to those areas as well. He is concerned about having to do rework after spending money on Whatcoat Street. The potential for future development is not guaranteed. The City of Oxford will also not have any control over what types of businesses occupy the 25% of space that is not occupied by Oxford College. A significant investment is being requested without knowing the cost or the return to the citizens. He suggests proposing to the developer a swap of the old City Hall building for the post office property, thereby allowing the vendor to work directly with Oxford College on the development. He feels the citizens would be much more comfortable with a lower-cost option.

Mayor Eady stated that option could be placed on the table. Laura McCanless and George Holt are in favor of proposing this option.

Mr. Barnard was asked for his thoughts on this proposal. He stated that the DDA is pretty far into the planning stage of the project based on their vision and direction. He does not feel that much cost is involved with turning the road to accommodate the development footprint. He believes the concerns about rework could be addressed by installing temporary or crush and run road. They have not finalized anything with the developer because they are still trying to finalize some issues with Oxford College. They do not plan to reengage with the developer until they have those issues resolved.

Regarding the DDA's mission to help develop the Town Center area's sense of place, he feels that they have done exactly that. The City of Oxford will retain ownership of the land and can place covenants or restrictions on the developer to control the types of businesses that can be there. He believes what they are proposing is well within the parameters of what the DDA was created for.

Ms. McCanless asked if they have any sense of a timeline for answers from Oxford College. Mike Ready stated they expect to have answers before their next meeting.

Jeff Wearing stated it seems to him that everything is at the City's expense. Oxford College and the developers will benefit but the development will do nothing for the City, while spending almost \$1 million.

Mayor Eady stated there are several sources of revenue that will benefit the City of Oxford when the project is completed.

Mr. Holt stated there is no way the City agreed to spend \$700,000 to work on Whatcoat Street and was not going to spend that much until the development started moving forward.

Mayor Eady stated the City could also ask the developer to cover part of the cost of the roadwork on Whatcoat Street.

Mr. Oliver asked if not turning Whatcoat Street is an option. Mayor Eady stated the City Council voted in March of this year to support the DDA's plans and to move forward to release a RFP based on the plan to turn the road.

Mr. Barnard stated that in his opinion, the plan for the building does not work without Whatcoat Street being turned.

Mr. Oliver reiterated his concern about doing street work to City standards, knowing that Oxford College plans to develop most of the corridor and will want to redo the sidewalks, lampposts, etc., to Emory standards.

Mayor Eady stated that although the City has approved their standards in the past, that does not mean the City will approve them in the future.

Mr. Barnard stated if the City decides that no improvements will be made to Whatcoat Street until Oxford College decides what they will do with the Forney property, he does not know what the way forward is.

Mr. Oliver stated that the intersection does not have any problems and is not dangerous. The only reason it is being discussed now is because of the development. Mayor Eady disagreed with this assertion saying that the design has been being discussed since 2012. The only difference is a movement 20 feet to the west. Mr. Oliver stated the work has not been done because there has been no compelling reason until now. Mayor Eady stated that is also not true. The Council was ready to move forward, then Oxford College asked the City to hold off because they wanted to make Pierce Street the main entrance to the campus.

Mr. Barnard asked if creating a town center is a compelling reason to go forward. The DDA's understanding was to create a sense of place, not create a revenue-generating hub for the City. He understands the City's concern about ROI, but the citizens want a nice place to gather. The current proposal is the most logical place to start in the opinion of the DDA. They have worked tirelessly for months to get to this point. If the City is back to the place where it feels like that is not the point again, he does not know why the DDA exists. If the City wants to pause, stop, or reverse what has been done, he feels like a lot of that work has been moot.

Ms. McCanless stated her belief that the City should not move forward until the answers are received from Oxford College. She also expressed support for Mayor Eady's shared cost idea for the road improvements.

Mayor Eady exercised his authority as a mayor to create a committee with Laura McCanless and George Holt assigned to attend DDA meetings and report back to the City Council. He advised that any other city council members can attend as citizens. Mr. Oliver stated that the open meeting rules about a quorum would prohibit all of them from attending. Mayor Eady does not believe that rule applies if they are attending as citizens.

Mr. Windham suggested a quarterly meeting with the DDA to address questions. He stated the main thing to keep in mind is not having a quorum of the Council there conducting any City

business. He also stated that up until two weeks ago, he was under the impression that the project was a done deal.

10. Other Business

11. Work Session Meeting Review

12. Executive Session

Jim Windham made a motion to go into Executive Session at 9:56 p.m. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

An Executive Session was held to discuss real estate matters.

Jim Windham made a motion to exit Executive Session at 10:08 p.m. Laura McCanless seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).

13. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by Mayor Eady at 10:08 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer