



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
WORK SESSION
MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2020 – 6:30 PM
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

David Eady – Mayor
George Holt – Councilmember
Jim Windham – Councilmember
Jeff Wearing – Councilmember
Lynn Bohanan – Councilmember
Avis Williams – Councilmember

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Pepper – City Manager
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Melissa Pratt – Associate Clerk

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Laura McCanless - Councilmember

OTHERS PRESENT: Laura Gafnea, Art Vinson, Laurie Vinson, Mike Ready, Michael McQuaide, Barbara Cole, Nick Cole

Agenda (Attachment A)

1. Mayor's Announcements

Several residents in Oxford were impacted by this afternoon's severe storm. A tree fell into the living room of a house on Emory Way, but no one was injured. Marable-Pirkle is assisting the Public Works staff with power restoration on West Bonnell Street. The Public Works staff will be working on downed trees and limbs once power is restored.

2. Reopening City Hall

Matt Pepper advised we have ordered hand sanitizer dispensers. Staff has plenty of masks and hand sanitizer. He feels that staff has the supplies and materials needed to stay safe for a reopening.

Mayor Eady asked if the staff feel comfortable with reopening. Mr. Pepper believes staff is comfortable with the protections in place. Marcia Brooks and Melissa Pratt both stated that they feel comfortable and that the City has done everything it can to make the office environment safe.

Mayor Eady expressed his appreciation for the staff's feedback and expressed that they do not want to put anyone unnecessarily at risk. He expressed his appreciation for the staff continuing to work during this difficult time and to meet the citizens' needs.

Further discussion resulted in the following decisions:

1. City Hall will reopen on June 29, 2020 provided the following conditions are met:
 - a. Employees in the City Clerk's office will practice safe distancing and will always wear masks.
 - b. Employees in the City Clerk's office will serve customers from behind the glass partition in the office.
 - c. All customers and visitors will be required to wear a mask inside City Hall.
2. Mayor Eady, Matt Pepper, and Marcia Brooks will have discretion to reclose City Hall if circumstances warrant without approval of the full Council.
3. The pavilion and playground at Asbury Street Park will also reopen on June 29, 2020. Signage will be placed throughout the park advising patrons to wear a mask, practice social distancing, and wash hands. The sign should also indicate that hand sanitizer is available at the pavilion. Patrons not following these requirements should be educated, not penalized. Mayor Eady requested that the staff share the sign design with the Council before ordering the signs.
4. The Farmer's Market will resume on June 29, 2020. Vendors should be advised to wear a mask when in close proximity with customers.
5. The Council does not feel that they can safely hold public meetings yet. There is not adequate space for them all to social distance. They may consider resuming in-person meetings with some Councilmembers present on site and some attending via teleconference. This issue will be discussed again at the July work session.

Mike Ready suggested that the boards and commissions such as the Downtown Development Authority and the Planning Commission could possibly begin meeting in person since they have smaller groups and can practice social distancing during their meetings. Laura Gafnea suggested allowing those groups to decide if they feel safe meeting in person and felt a hybrid approach for Council meetings may be feasible.

3. Penalties and Fees for Future Utility Bills

The City of Oxford has been waiving penalties and fees on utility bills for several months. The Council discussed whether the penalties and fees should be reinstated yet. Jeff Wearing expressed his opinion that the impact of COVID-19 is not yet over, and the penalties and fees should still be waived, with plans to discuss the issue again at the July work session. All other City Councilmembers agreed.

4. **Discussion on Variance Request for 903 Asbury Street** (Attachment B)

Art and Laurie Vinson submitted a request for a variance at their property to make improvements to an existing structure at 903 Asbury Street. A variance is requested for the 10-foot minimum side setback requirement. The Planning Commission recommends approval of the variance request. Mr. and Mrs. Vinson have spoken with their neighbors, and none have voiced any opposition. They have a letter indicating as such from one of their neighbors.

George Holt asked what criteria is being used to approve the variance. He just wants to ensure that there are valid grounds for approval that can apply to others who make this request. James Windham explained that in the past, if there was no opposition from neighbors, when the changes do not infringe on the property line, and particularly with existing buildings, the variance has been generally granted. Mayor Eady added that if the footprint of the building is not changing, the variance has been granted. Mr. Windham also stated that another criterion used in the past is that it is a permanent building.

A formal hearing for this request will be held at the beginning of the July regular session. The variance can then be voted on in the regular session. All Councilmembers present were in favor of approving the request. In the interest of fair due process, Mayor Eady asked Mr. Vinson if he feels comfortable with the hearing being held via teleconference. Mr. Vinson indicated he has no problem with this.

5. **July 4th Parade**

Mayor Eady stated that some from the community had expressed displeasure on the city's Facebook page concerning the cancellation of the July 4th parade. There is little time remaining to organize the event at the scale it is usually held, but if the Oxford Historical Society and Oxford Lions Club wish to take it on at this point we will not prohibit them from doing so. However, Highway 81 will not be blocked for a parade.

No Councilmembers were in favor of modifying their original decision.

6. **Emory Sewer Project** (Attachment C)

Grass seed was planted at six homes on Emory Street to restore grass that was dug up to install the sewer main on Emory Street. The seed that was planted has not grown well. Staff recommends replacement of the seed and straw with Centipede sod. Three bids have been obtained for this work. Staff recommends approval of the lowest bid by CMC Landscaping for \$7,100.00.

Matt Pepper added that the bid from CMC Landscaping was revised and sent out to the Councilmembers with specific details regarding the scope of the work to be performed. George Holt stated that the property owners should be required to sign a statement acknowledging that they will be required to water the sod at regular intervals to maintain its health.

All Councilmembers and citizens present were in favor of approving the installation of the sod and requiring the signed statement.

7. **Spare Vehicle for the Police Department**

During budget discussions Mayor Eady stated that the City may try to find a used police car that can serve as a spare until the Police Department can purchase a new car and rotate one of their current ones out for a spare. A fully equipped 2008 Crown Victoria Interceptor with approximately 86,000 miles is available from the City of Winterville for \$3,500. The odometer must be replaced, and the lettering must be changed. Chief Harvey has driven the vehicle and is impressed with it. Chief Harvey is requesting authorization to make the purchase. There was no opposition from Councilmembers present.

8. **101 Longstreet Circle Lot**

The lot at 101 Longstreet Circle was donated to the City of Oxford. A recommendation was made by James Windham to turn the lot into a passive park, however the Trees, Parks and Recreation Board recommended that a park not be built at this location. In the past one person had shown interest in purchasing the lot from the City of Oxford but would not agree to the terms proposed by the city. Mr. Hurenza Lewis has approached the city to express his interest in purchasing the lot to build a home on it. If the city wants to try to sell it, the proper procedures must be followed to solicit bids. The suggestion by Mr. Windham also still stands as a possible use of this land. Mr. Windham stated that it would also be a nice addition to the sidewalk that is already being installed.

Jeff Wearing stated that selling the property would generate tax and utilities revenue for the city. He is in favor of going through the process to solicit bids. He feels that a park is not feasible at this location.

George Holt stated he thought the neighbors in the area had indicated they did not want a park at the location. Mr. Windham agreed this was true, however, he thinks some may have misunderstood what he meant by park. He did not mean playground equipment or recreational areas. He meant an area of beautification. However, if Mr. Lewis is willing to meet the requirements of the solicitation and the city asks for a minimum bid, he does not have any major issues with moving forward with the bid solicitation.

Mayor Eady indicated the city would need to consult with its attorney to ensure procedures are followed. Mr. Windham stated that including a statement about the city having the right to refuse any and all bids should accomplish the same thing as setting a minimum bid. Mayor Eady summarized that the City Council is in agreement to try to obtain a market price for the lot and make it a home again. If this process is not successful, the city can return to the idea of making the lot an asset for the neighborhood.

Mayor Eady asked Matt Pepper to move forward with starting the procedure to solicit bids for the lot.

9. **Sustainability Committee**

Mayor Eady plans to appoint a standing committee that would continue to advise the City Council and to provide bandwidth for projects recommended by the previous committee. The committee will not have any authority per se, but will have permission to recommend and help execute projects the City Council is willing to invest in. Mayor Eady asked for

feedback from Councilmembers and recommend candidates for membership on this committee.

James Windham nominated Laura McCanless for the committee. He would also like to see the new committee review the recommendations from the previous committee to identify quick fixes. For example, he feels citizens calling for yard waste is more efficient than scheduling a day to drive throughout the city searching for yard waste that needs to be picked up. George Holt agreed with this recommendation.

Avis Williams expressed appreciation for the work done previously and would like to see movement on the recommendations from that group so that their effort is not wasted, and the new group does not have to start all over. Mayor Eady stated that he has spoken with Laura McCanless, and she is willing to serve on it.

Mayor Eady pointed out that some of the recommendations have already been implemented such as the ban on inorganic pesticides, the meadow rights-of-way, and the changes at City Hall which the staff have been very supportive of. These changes have laid the foundation for the new group moving forward. He will form the committee and asks anyone who has recommendations for membership to let him know.

10. Placement of the Little Library

The Councilmembers received an email with pictures of the Little Library that the Coles built. The Council approved placement of the Little Library within the city. The exact placement now needs to be decided.

Matt Pepper provided a recommendation from the Trees, Parks and Recreation Board to place it just off the concrete on the East side of the pavilion so that it is covered from the weather. Another option is to place it on one of the islands near the parking lot, but it would be more exposed to the weather there. Barbara Cole has advised that if it is not closed properly, rain can get inside it and damage the books.

Avis Williams asked who would be responsible for ensuring the compartment is closed properly. Jeff Wearing and James Windham both suggested adding a spring to the door. Mr. Wearing also would like to have another one installed close to Oxford College. Barbara Cole stated that when this project was approved, the plan was to have two placed in Oxford, one in Asbury Street Park and one near Oxford College. She also stated that the door may be too heavy for a spring, but it has a magnet and a latch. Her daughter's school has two on site, and they have not had problems. Mayor Eady and the Council thanked the Coles for completing the library. They made theirs extra-wide so that children's books and adult books could both be placed in it, and they have books to put in it when it is installed.

Mr. Windham suggested the door could face to the East to minimize exposure to weather. He also suggested placing covers over some of the benches and recommended having more than two Little Libraries. The bench areas would be good places for them.

All Councilmembers present were in favor of moving forward with the Little Library. Mayor Eady stated that the city does not have money in the budget for covers for the benches right now. His suggestion is to take the Trees, Parks and Recreation Board's recommendation of placing the first one on the East side of the pavilion. If this does not work well, it can always be moved later, and perhaps more can be installed at a later time. If all Councilmembers are amenable to this suggestion staff can proceed with getting the first one from the Coles and placing it at the park.

11. George Street Park Fence (Attachment C)

The Trees, Parks and Recreation Board recommends that the Council approve a contract with Bentley Cannon for \$3,600 to replace the existing split-rail fence at George Street Park. The Council previously approved a lower bid for this work, however, the bidder refused to sign the contract. The bid being presented for consideration was the other bid when the Council previously approved the work. Staff recommends that the Council award the contract to Bentley Cannon.

All Councilmembers approved moving forward with this contract.

12. Voting Delegates for the Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia (MEAG) (Attachment D)

A voting delegate and alternate are appointed by the city to serve as the city's representatives for MEAG. Neither of the designated officials are still on the City Council so new delegates must be appointed. A resolution should be signed stating that the City Council appoints Mayor Eady as the voting delegate. Mayor Eady recommended that James Windham serve as the alternate.

All Councilmembers were in agreement with the recommendations.

Mayor Eady adjourned the meeting at 8:09 p.m.

13. Executive Session

The City Council convened Executive Session at 8:15 p.m. to discuss real estate matters.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer