



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
REGULAR SESSION
MONDAY, August 3, 2020 – 7:10 PM
Via Teleconference**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

David Eady – Mayor
George Holt – Councilmember
James Windham – Councilmember
Jeff Wearing – Councilmember
Laura McCanless – Councilmember

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Pepper – City Manager
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Melissa Pratt – Associate Clerk
Jody Reid – Public Works Supervisor
Dave Harvey – Police Chief
David Strickland – City Attorney

ELECTED OFFICIALS NOT PRESENT:

Lynn Bohanan – Councilmember
Avis Williams – Councilmember

OTHERS PRESENT: Art Vinson, Laurie Vinson, Michael McQuaide, Laura Gafnea (Oxford College), Tom Spigolon (Covington News), Rev. Charlie Williams (Mt. Zion First Baptist Church), Dr. Laklieshia Izzard, Barbara Cole, Monique Carter

1. The meeting was called to order by the Hon. David Eady, Mayor.
2. The invocation was delivered by Rev. Charlie Williams.
3. Pledge of Allegiance.
4. **A motion was made by George Holt to accept the Agenda for August 3, 2020. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (5/0).**
(Attachment A)
5. **A motion was made by George Holt to accept the Consent Agenda for August 3, 2020. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (5/0).** (Attachment B)
6. **Mayor's Report**
Mayor Eady expressed condolences for Councilmember Avis Williams on the passing of her mother this morning and for Deputy Clerk Stacey Mullen on the passing of her father last week.

Mayor Eady advised that the City of Oxford joined the Georgia Municipal Association's (GMA) 2020 Census Challenge, which involves completing a different activity each week to maximize participation in the 2020 census. This includes social media outreach, press releases, and working with community partners such as local churches. The city has set up a computer in City Hall dedicated for citizens to complete the census online, and the city has also sent a mailout. He asked that the Councilmembers share the social media posts and otherwise promote the census since an accurate count for the City of Oxford is very important.

Mayor Eady announced a blood drive will be held at City Hall on August 18th. He encouraged participation and advised that donations will be tested for COVID-19 antibodies.

7. **Planning Commission Recommendations/Petitions**

None.

8. **Citizen Concerns**

Barbara Cole recommended placing a sign in front of City Hall concerning the census.

Dr. Lakliesha Izzard requested information about running for office in Oxford. Dr. Izzard was referred to the city's Election Superintendent, Stacey Mullen, for information.

9. **COVID-19 Update**

Mayor Eady and Matt Pepper attended a conference call with Dr. Norris Little, Chief Medical Officer at Piedmont Newton Hospital and Dr. Audrey Arona, District Health Director of the East Metro Health District (Georgia Department of Public Health). They advised that Newton County has a positive test rate of 17.8% (10% or more is considered high), but they had seen a decline over the past ten days. However, over the past few days the case rate has started to climb again. The turnaround time for testing has improved to 48 hours. A permanent testing site has been set up at Springfield Baptist Church in Rockdale County.

Matt Pepper stated that customers have been compliant with the requirement to wear a mask in City Hall. The city continues to conduct cleaning and disinfecting on a regular schedule, and staff are practicing social distancing and cleaning shared surfaces after each use.

Mayor Eady stated that the City of Covington has closed. Their layout is not as conducive to practicing measures to serve customers safely as Oxford's is.

Laura McCanless relayed information that Lynn Bohanan had given her concerning a gathering in Asbury Street Park over the weekend. Ms. Bohanan was concerned because the gathering was large, and the attendees were not practicing social distancing. Mayor Eady stated he did speak with Ms. Bohanan. The COVID-19 resolution which was passed in July only covered city buildings. The city's stay-at-home order has expired. Governor Kemp's latest Executive Order is the current governing standard. In that, a "gathering" is defined as fifty or more people. Mayor Eady believes the group in question was probably

less than fifty. He does want to encourage people to wear a mask whenever one is in the presence of others not in their social cohort, since this practice continues to be the recommended way to minimize spread of the virus.

Mayor Eady advised Chief David Harvey that he feels it is appropriate if one of his officers sees a large group gathered and not social distancing and wearing masks to stop and let them know as a point of education that we encourage them to practice these safety measures.

James Windham expressed his belief that, given the rise in positive tests and deaths, masks should be mandatory for those who use the pavilion at Asbury Street Park. Mayor Eady stated the Council can pass this restriction if so desired, but with the understanding that the Governor's current executive order says that we cannot. This issue is the point of contention that gave rise to the lawsuit between the State of Georgia and the City of Atlanta. In Mayor Eady's opinion, the City of Oxford is well within its rights to enact such a restriction.

George Holt expressed reservations about Oxford's police officers approaching people in the pavilion given there is no requirement to wear masks there and making announcement over a loudspeaker may be better since it is less confrontational. Chief Harvey favored the one-on-one approach which is more in line with community-oriented policing.

Laura McCanless felt that a mask requirement for city properties is appropriate, especially at the pavilion, because it is a defined space and it tends to encourage people to get cozy within the space. George Holt agreed.

Although Jeff Wearing believes it is difficult to police people all the time, he supports adding city properties to the order. Mayor Eady stated that enforcement of the order would be similar to when the city passed its first order. That is, when an officer sees someone in violation of the mask order, use the opportunity to educate the person, and if the person refuses to comply, issue that person a citation.

Mr. Wearing also recommended refusal to rent the pavilion to groups that refuse to comply with the requirements.

Mr. Windham stated the very nature of the pavilion discourages social distancing, so he believes requiring wearing masks for groups there is appropriate. Melissa Pratt asked if the Council should consider closing the pavilion. Mayor Eady stated the Council decided to reopen it on June 29th. The Council could certainly decide to close it again, but his thought is it would be better to keep it open and add the mask requirement. Customers renting the pavilion could be informed of this requirement when they rent it and should acknowledge this requirement when they rent it.

Mayor Eady advised that he and Mr. Pepper would work with City Attorney David Strickland to amend the mask order and schedule a called meeting in conjunction with the August

work session to vote on it. The amended order will include all city properties. If the Council desires, it can discuss closing the pavilion as a separate issue during that same meeting.

Jim Windham pointed out that trails are city property. Mayor Eady advised they could be exempted in the amended order.

Barbara Cole asked if masks would be required on the playground at Asbury Street Park, and if so, what age would be required to wear a mask. Mayor Eady advised the city would adhere to the standards of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) regarding this issue.

10. **Resolution for CARES Act Funds** (Attachment C)

A provision of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act makes funds available for municipalities. Funds may only be spent on necessary, yet unforeseen expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In order for the City of Oxford to receive the initial distribution of funds, the City Council is required to adopt a resolution stating that any funds received will be used only for their intended purpose.

Laura McCanless made a motion to approve the proposed resolution for CARES Act funds. George Holt seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Ms. McCanless asked if ideas for use of the funds would be discussed tonight, since Mr. Pepper had asked the Councilmembers to brainstorm ideas. Mayor Eady preferred that all Councilmembers give this some further thought, and the ideas could be discussed at a later time.

The motion carried unanimously (5/0).

11. **2020 Property Tax Millage Rate Adoption** (Attachment D)

The City of Oxford proposes a property tax millage rate of 6.662 for 2020. **Laura McCanless made a motion to approve the proposed property tax millage rate. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion.**

Discussion:

Jim Windham expressed concern about the number of absentee ownership properties in recent years. He recommended further discussion and study concerning a way to relieve some of the tax burden for property owners who live in their homes. George Holt advised while there cannot be different tax rates for different groups, the same thing could be accomplished by adjusting the homestead exemption.

The motion carried (4/1). George Holt voted nay.

12. **Revised Intergovernmental Agreement for the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax** (Attachment E)

The TSPLOST IGA which was approved by the Oxford City Council in July has been amended to correct some language and to add the lists of projects from the participating

cities. Staff recommends approval of the revised resolution. Mayor Eady reiterated that the resolution is not to approve the TSPLOST tax. It is only approving the placement of the question on the referendum in November in Newton County.

George Holt made a motion to approve the amended resolution. Laura McCanless seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

13. Invoice Approval

Mayor Eady stated that the financial policies are being reviewed to determine if this process can be streamlined. One issue being reviewed is if an invoice should be presented for approval on this list if the Council has already approved completion of the project. Jeff Wearing asked if a notation could be made that an invoice has been paid. George Holt advised that type of information is what is being worked on now. He used to review invoices before they were paid, but he is not doing this anymore. Since he has stopped doing this, the procedure has been confusing. The goal is to provide full and transparent information without requiring a vote for purchases that have already been approved.

Jeff Wearing made a motion to approve the invoices as listed. George Holt seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Eady gave an additional opportunity for community members to speak. Rev. Charlie Williams raised an issue concerning the performance of the current garbage pickup service the city contracts with. They left trash and debris in the church parking lot of Mt. Zion First Baptist Church and destroyed their parking lot when turning around. Rev. Williams advised he has photos. Mayor Eady asked Rev. Williams to email the photos to him and Matt Pepper and the issue would be addressed.

14. James Windham made a motion to adjourn Regular Session at 8:12 pm. Jeff Wearing seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (5/0).

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer