



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING
REGULAR SESSION
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 03, 2020 – 7:00PM
CITY HALL**

PRESENT: David Eady, Mayor; Council members: George Holt, Laura McCanless, Avis Williams, Lynn Bohanan, Jim Windham, Jeff Wearing. **Staff members present:** City Manager Matt Pepper, Deputy City Clerk Stacey Mullen, Utility Superintendent Jody Reid, Police Chief Dave Harvey, City Attorney David Strickland.

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Ready, Cheryl Ready, Art Vinson, Laurie Vinson, Linda Allen, Judy Greer, Peggy Madden, Theresa Eady, Erik Oliver, Hoyt Oliver, Nick Cole, Louise Eady, Sherry Jackson, Melissa Hage, Mike McQuaide, Scott Fairclough and Laura Gafnea of Oxford College.

1. The meeting was called to order by David S. Eady, Mayor
2. Invocation was delivered by Hoyt Oliver
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. **Motion to accept the Agenda for February 03, 2020 was made by Wearing- seconded- Williams, approved unanimous 7/0. Attachment A**
5. **Consent Agenda- Approved unanimous 7/0. Attachment B**

6. Mayor's Report

Mayor Eady announced that the annual meeting for the Oxford Historical Cemetery Foundation would take place on Sunday, February 09, 2020 at 2:00pm in the Community Room at City Hall. He encouraged all to attend.

7. Planning Commission Recommendations/Petitions

None

8. Citizen Concerns

Melissa Hage (211 West Bonnell St.) expressed her concerns regarding the development being pursued by the City of Covington and Newton County on the borders of the City of Oxford. She advised she chose to live in the City of Oxford rather than Atlanta, because of its quiet community, abundant trees and green spaces. She is concerned the proposed development puts the preservation of the city's vital green spaces and wholesome charm in jeopardy. There was also worry that the properties on the margins of Oxford, not yet built on, but slated for development, will be developed and destroy the peaceful atmosphere, creating pervasive noise and potentially polluting our clean air and water. She said that trees and green spaces increase property values and are necessary for human health and well-being. According to the World Health Organization, having access to green spaces can reduce health

inequalities and aid in the treatment of mental illness. Forests ecosystems and green spaces provide numerous environmental benefits; such as: buffering noise, absorbing airborne pollutants, mitigating soil erosion, filtering polluted run-off water and sequestering CO2. As such, she requested that the city considers the acquisition of available property on the perimeter of the City of Oxford and consider greening or reforesting any acquired properties.

Mike McQuaide (1026 Emory St) provided context to Ms. Hage's comments. He mentioned that some citizens formed a group (Sustainable Oxford) that developed their first project of creating a pollinator garden; subsequently, this group was commissioned by former Mayor Jerry Roseberry as an *ad hoc* committee, under the leadership of councilmembers Jim Windham and George Holt. Their role was to propose a series of suggestions for the city council's consideration regarding sustainability that were limited to steps that the city could take. After such time, the group decided to take it a step further and pursue more broadly based ideas regarding sustainability, which was the superior quality of life in the community of Oxford. Mr. McQuaide stated that the group's latest mission is to explore the option of containing a green buffer around the city.

Mr. McQuaide presented a land use map for the City of Covington, which detailed the zoning. It showed the surrounding areas of Oxford zoned as heavy industrial. Based on these findings, Sustainable Oxford began to explore the plausibility of containing a green buffer around the City of Oxford. Considering no one in the group had experience with such an undertaking, they met with the organizers of the Madison-Morgan Conservancy, as well as a real-estate attorney of downtown Madison, and development officers with Oxford College. They were advised to find a 501(c)(3) group that could be in receipt of land, restricted covenants, or conservation easements, which would simplify the proposed plan. From there, they spoke with President Maurice Carter, of Sustainable Newton, and proposed that Sustainable Newton would be the receiver of any real estate that the city may or may not try to protect. Since then, Mr. Carter went to Sustainable Newton's attorney (Frank Turner, Jr.) to determine the plausibility. Turned out, there was plausibility but not without many contingencies.

Mr. McQuaide mentioned there was a consensus among the citizens that the threat of well-being, as a small town, arise from outside of Oxford. The intrinsic dynamics don't really pose a threat to what is most valued about the town of Oxford. The group has exhausted their opportunities; all the data has been gathered and they have spoken to those with knowledge of such processes. He informed Mayor & Council of the possibly of coming before them in the future with a request for support with the next step, which may include finding a grant writer. The overall goal is to determine what can be done and what the means would be to achieve such goals.

Mr. Windham raised a concern regarding the city allowing another public entity to acquire the land. He explained that by doing so, the city would sacrifice some control over the land. Mr. McQuaide responded that Mr. Windham's concerns were legitimate. Mr. McQuaide related that they asked Sustainable Newton that, if the land became available, would they entertain the idea of acquiring it. He continued that other contingencies (funds, owner's willing to sell) exist to which there are no answers currently. He added that this Mayor and Council could acquire the land with the understanding that future Councils are not bound to keep the land as a buffer. He advised there is no mandate or statutory authority to do anything. The idea is to just determine what's possible to do to try to protect what citizens deem are the most valued parts of living in Oxford.

Ms. Williams questioned if the city had ever considered having our own land trust alliance, like in Newton County. Mr. McQuaide advised that there was an upcoming appointment on February 29th

with the executive director of the Georgia-Alabama Land Trust to explore the plausibility of Ms. Williams' suggestion, though nothing binding will come out of it.

Mr. Windham asked if any discussion has occurred with the Newton County Land Trust. They may be an option for the city to use to help acquire the land.

Erik Oliver (402 West Clark Street) added that when Newton Trails was planning out the trails systems, several citizens deeded portions of their land to Newton Trails.

Mr. Windham asked Mr. Strickland if the city had their own trust or conservancy and someone decided to contribute land, would it be tax deductible? Mr. Strickland advised that if anyone did donate land to the city or a 501(c)(3) entity, he presumed that the same tax deduction would be available.

Mr. Windham asked Mr. Strickland if the city itself could form a conservancy and a 501(c)(3) and make it an independent entity like the Downtown Development Authority. Mr. Strickland advised that research would be necessary to determine the possibility. Mayor Eady suggested that it would be beneficial for Mr. Strickland to speak with Frank Turner, Jr. regarding the existing mediums. Mr. Windham's overall concern would be if the conservancy would be independent from the vote of future councils.

Cheryl Ready (70 Wentworth Dr) announced that the Tree Board would be hosting their annual Arbor Day festivities, held at the Oxford College dining hall on Saturday, February 22, 2020 at 10am.

Erik Oliver made an announcement to remind citizens that the Historical Society's annual meeting would be held at Old Church on Monday, February 10th at 7:00pm.

9. Yarbrough House Renovation

A motion was made by Wearing-second- Windham to table any decisions on the design options, subject to getting together with the Historical Society, then have the Council meet at the Yarbrough House and go over the plans to decide what's most suited. As well as, hiring a structural engineer to provide an assessment on the condition of the flooring to determine its future uses. Approved unanimous 7/0. Attachment C

Erik Oliver stated that the Historical Society recently met at the Yarbrough House with prior knowledge of the existing plans presented by the *ad hoc* Yarbrough House Committee. It was the unanimous consensus that minimal changes to the structure of the house were in the best interest of the house, its future uses, as well as personal use.

Ms. Williams asked how long the process would take to obtain a structural assessment of the Yarbrough House. Mayor Eady advised that it would be contingent upon the hiring process of a structural engineer (based on standard city processes for procurement), as well as the completion of the engineering report. His intention would be to get it on the work session agenda as soon as possible. Mr. Wearing added that he promised to continue the effort in ensuring the Yarbrough House renovation is completed.

10. Right-of-way to Meadow Experiment Site

A motion was made by Holt-second- Williams to convert a section of the city's right-of-way to a meadow, located on Wesley Street, just north of Fletcher Street. This project will be cultivated by Daniel Parsons of the Oxford College organic farm and budgeted with the remaining funding from the pollinator garden. Approved unanimous, 7/0. Attachment D

11. Planning Commission Appointment

A motion was made by McCanless-second- Wearing to appoint Mike Ready to serve on the Planning Commission, Approved unanimous 7/0.

12. Invoice Approval

A motion was made by Wearing-second- Holt to approve the invoices, Approved unanimous 7/0.

Motion to adjourn Regular Session at 7:38pm- Windham-second- Wearing, Approved unanimous 7/0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stacey Mullen
Deputy City Clerk