



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL MEETING  
WORK SESSION  
MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2020 – 6:30 PM  
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

**ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:**

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

**APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:**

Matt Pepper – City Manager  
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer  
Jody Reid – Utility Superintendent  
Dave Harvey – Police Chief

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Mike Ready, Art Vinson, Laurie Vinson, Laura Gafnea, Beth Morgan

Teleconference # 1-650-215-5226, Access Code 950685756; Notified Covington News, posted on doors of City Hall, distributed to Citizens' List and posted on City of Oxford's website and Facebook page.

**Agenda** (Attachment A)

**1. Mayor's Announcements**

Mayor Eady advised that since we are conducting this meeting via teleconference, he will facilitate the discussion and ask for comment from each Councilmember as each item is discussed. He will also open the discussion up to the community during the meeting.

Mayor Eady sent a presentation to the Councilmembers shortly before this meeting summarizing the points from a conference call for mayors that was organized by the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA). During the conference call, Dr. Del Rio, Executive Dean of the Emory University School of Medicine, spoke about the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Del Rio has urged Governor Kemp to essentially shut down the State of Georgia, similar to what other states have done. Governor Kemp gave a press conference at 5:00 p.m. but did not restrict the State of Georgia to the extent other states have.

Mayor Eady wants to urge people in the Oxford community to take heed of the advice of public health professionals. Only go out if absolutely necessary. If buying groceries, try order and pick up rather than going into grocery stores. If enjoying the outdoors, follow

social distancing protocols, and stay within your social cohort of individuals you have been in contact with over the past couple of weeks.

It is anticipated that the number of cases will increase as testing sites become more readily available. Anyone needing to be tested should contact the Georgia Department of Public Health to find out the nearest testing site.

City of Oxford administrative staff are working remotely except when they must be on site for tasks such as monthly billing. City Hall is closed to the public. Customers can place their payments in the mail or in the drop box. City staff are accommodating cash paying customers through appointments. Phone calls are being forwarded to administrative staff. Public works staff are working on an on-call basis, responding to work orders as needed. They are being paid during this time. Mayor Eady asked if there are any questions from the Councilmembers about these procedures.

Mr. Windham asked if a decision has been made about utility service cutoffs for those who work on an hourly basis and therefore are not being paid and may not have adequate funds during this time. Mayor Eady's thought is that we will suspend all utility cutoffs for the time being if the Council approves.

Mr. Vinson asked for clarification that cutoffs would be suspended, which Mayor Eady confirmed.

Chief Harvey stated that his department is working in full force. They have had one officer sick, and he believes it is due to pollen and allergies. He is supposed to go to the doctor on March 24. His staff is stopping vehicles only for egregious violations and using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during contact with anyone, including gloves and masks.

Mayor Eady advised Chief Harvey that priority testing is available for law enforcement officers.

Ms. Williams asked if we have enough PPE for our police officers and public works staff. Chief Harvey indicated that Newton County EMA provided them with an ample supply. Mayor Eady stated that the administrative staff have gloves in the office, but they are not interacting with the public much since the office is closed.

Mr. Windham recommended covering the mouthpiece hole in the glass at the City Clerk's window to keep droplets from coming in, and for the long term, place a device such as those theaters have in the hole. Mayor Eady advised city staff will check with the Health Department for recommendations.

2. **Resolution for the Community Development Block Grant Application** (Attachment B)  
City Manager Matt Pepper advised that the City Council must pass a resolution stating that it approves submission of the application for the Community Development Block Grant for the city's proposed water main improvement project. The application due date is May 1.

No questions were raised. The resolution will be voted on during the April regular Council meeting.

3. **FY 2021 Operating and Capital Budgets** (Attachment C)

Matt Pepper presented a first draft of the proposed FY 2021 Operating and Capital Budgets for review and comment.

Operating Budget:

- Property tax revenue – assumption is same millage rate will be retained.
- Motor vehicle ad valorem and TAVT revenue – Newton County Tax Commissioner is placing the vast majority of these taxes in TAVT.
- LOST revenue – increase based on upward growth and spending in Newton County.
- Professional services expenses – pertains to expenses for legal services and the city's external audit. This amount can be decreased because of a reduction in need of utilizing these services for specialized situations.
- Yarbrough House operating expenses – In light of recent discussions which reflect that no staff will be needed, this line items is reduced. The remaining amount will cover utilities.
- Computer upgrades – four (4) new laptops for police cars for \$6,500. Laptops must be upgraded to accommodate the Windows 10 operating system. This is currently a separate item, but the purchase falls under Small Equipment Under \$5,000, and it will be moved to that category.
- Parks and Recreation – decreased supplies and materials and energy and utilities because the city has a better idea of the cost to run Asbury Park. City Park and Trail Maintenance is also decreased based on past spending.
- Small increase in water charges and sales based on historic collections.
- Water and sewer fund expenditures increase – new sewer line on Emory Street.
- Electric revenue and expenditures are placeholders while the city works with Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG) to fine tune these figures.
- Sanitation – includes potential rate increases to be discussed later in this meeting.

Mayor Eady commented that adjustments may be required to the LOST revenue estimates depending on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We may not know the full impact until after the beginning of the fiscal year, and a budget amendment may be required to address the updated revenue projections. Mr. Holt stated that this issue could impact multiple areas of the budget, and customers may not be able to pay for their services, which could reduce revenue.

Mr. Holt and Ms. Bohanan asked if the \$5,000 in Small Equipment Under \$5,000 is separate from the Computer Upgrades. Mayor Eady asked Chief Harvey if there is equipment other than the laptops that will need to be replaced. Chief Harvey indicated he might if equipment breaks down and needs to be replaced. Mayor Eady acknowledged that these amounts are to some extent placeholders for unknowns. They are based on historical cost to replace equipment.

Mr. Windham expressed concern about combining line items at a time when the budget will be strained. He feels it's important to be able to see where money is being spent and combining budgeted items into groups makes them less transparent. Mayor Eady clarified that the Computer Upgrades line item amount should have been included with Small Equipment Under \$5,000 in the past, but at some point, a new account was created. Moving the amount into Small Equipment Under \$5,000 would simply be correcting this error. However, he will not protest if the City Council wants to keep the item separate, or if they want to decrease the other amounts that are based on historical costs to tighten the budget.

### Capital Budget

Mayor Eady stated that this year's budget starts with the previous year's budget which was built based on the Financial Sustainability Assessment that Mike Ready and his committee completed. There were projected expenditures out through 2024, but there have also been some new priorities emerge and things that were not represented in the 2024 projections, such as buffers to protect the city from encroachment. Some items in the proposed Capital Budget may be partially or fully covered in the operating budget. Blue items are new items.

Mayor and Councilmember request in the Capital Budget:

- Emory Street Sidewalk – I-20 bridge – documents completed, about to break ground. The City of Oxford contributed \$180,000 of the \$700,000 in the FY2020 budget, and the rest came from federal or state sources
- Emory Street Sidewalk – E. Soule Street to city limits - \$500,000
- Hwy. 81 Streetlamps – for safety walking on sidewalks at night
- Radar/Speed Signs – based on concern for speed coming into Oxford
- Pedestrian Crossing at Asbury Park
- Speed Humps – may be covered in FY2020 budget, but included as a placeholder for now
- Lawnmowers – Public Works staff needs two (2) new lawnmowers
- Professional Services – placeholder for DDA if Town Center progress occurs (will be repaid to city upon development)
- Smart Meters for Electric and Water Systems

Mayor Eady asked Ms. McCanless to comment on the need for funds for the pollinator gardens in the Capital Budget. She stated that traditionally, the Tree Board pays for trees and tree health. The pollinator right-of-way experiment will take a couple of years to mature. She is not sure if maintenance of those areas will require equipment. Currently a volunteer is providing equipment for cultivation. Other options may be paying by the job or working with Oxford College in partnership. Mr. Windham recommended putting \$4,500 in the Operating Budget instead of the Capital Budget for this purpose.

Staff requests in the Capital Budget:

- Sewer camera/locator – the City of Oxford currently asks City of Covington to locate a blockage. Mr. Reid stated that this service is needed 8-10 times per year.
- Water Tower altitude valve – Is about 38 years old, has been rebuilt three times. It is failing right now, causing the water tank to overflow periodically. Mr. Windham added

that when the tank overflows, it undermines the street and the trail. The \$33,000 cost includes installation.

- Police vehicles – Ford is no longer making police sedans. The police department is requesting Ford Explorers, which are considerably more expensive.

Mr. Wearing stated that a locator for the sewer camera would help isolate a blockage to within about a foot. The current method is not very precise and requires tearing up a lot of asphalt and property. Mr. Holt observed that it may be more cost-effective to rent this device when needed to avoid upkeep costs. Mr. Wearing acknowledged that they are very expensive to repair.

Mayor Eady suggested looking at some other brands of vehicles to see if they have what Chief Harvey needs. Chief Harvey mentioned that the police equipment makes up a lot of the cost. Based on his experience he does not feel very good about Dodge Chargers or Chevrolet models. Mr. Windham suggested also checking with Toyota, Honda, and Hyundai. Mr. Wearing commented that the other vehicles besides Ford are not as safe. Mayor Eady asked that staff obtain some additional price and vehicle rating information as well as equipment needs and durability for comparison between a few alternatives.

Mr. Holt asked for clarification on the expenditures in FY2020 for the line item of City Master Plan. Mayor Eady advised a large part of that amount was for strategic land purchases. Staff will provide Mr. Holt with a complete breakdown of these costs.

Mr. Windham asked why a separate line item is needed for land purchases on the East side of town for \$50,000. Mayor Eady stated it may not be needed and recommended that the Councilmembers think about it some more. He put it in as a placeholder for the concerns about protecting the East side of town from encroachment.

Mike Ready stated he would provide any comments to Mayor Eady and Matt Pepper.

Ms. McCanless noted that there is no amount listed for speed humps. Mayor Eady acknowledged he added that as a placeholder, and the Council can plug in an amount if it is needed.

#### **4. City Health Insurance**

City Clerk/Treasurer Marcia Brooks advised the City Council that she and Matt Pepper had sought a quote from the GMA's health insurance plan for employee coverage for medical, dental, vision and life insurance. The renewal for the city's current plan was also received from a local broker, who has provided insurance coverage to the City of Oxford's employees for the past eight or so years. Both are through Anthem Insurance. The quote from the city's current provider increased medical insurance rates by about 40% compared to the city's current cost. The GMA plan increases the cost by about 20%. In addition, the GMA plan provides lower deductibles, out of pocket maximums, copayments and coinsurance in many cases.

Staff recommends that the City of Oxford accept the GMA plan for the coming plan year. The city's plan currently begins on May 1. The city would also like to convert to a calendar year to standardize its plan and make it more like other plans. The quote from GMA is for May-December 2020. In the fall of 2020, GMA will provide a quote for calendar year 2021. If rates increase for January-June of 2021, an amendment to the FY2021 operating budget may be needed. Since both plans are through Anthem for medical and vision coverage, the city anticipates little if any disruption to employees as far as being required to change doctors. The dental plan is different, so there could be some changes for dental insurance. The city has prepared documentation to distribute to employees to help them navigate the change.

All council members and the mayor are in favor of the change.

#### 5. **Sanitation Services**

Matt Pepper advised that the current garbage/recycle pickup contractor (Latham Sanitation) has requested a \$.26 cost of living adjustment on the residential rate as well as an additional \$.50 on the residential rate to help cover the cost of the site they take the recyclables to, which has begun charging them a tonnage rate (Pratt Industries in Conyers). Mr. Pepper advised them that he would present these requests to the City Council for consideration.

Mayor Eady indicated he had an issue with this request coming so soon after we advised them of issues we had with their service. If the Council wishes to grant Latham's request, they should be advised that per our contract, any changes will go into effect with the new contract year, which is July 1. We could also advise them that we are going to rebid the contract and see if anyone bids lower.

Mr. Windham stated that the City of Covington recently contracted with Latham, so they likely are still offering the lowest price. With the recycling market changing dramatically, they may be in a position where they need additional help. He has no issues with the increase if it starts at the beginning of the new contract term.

Mr. Wearing voiced his displeasure with the service provided by Latham. He understands that rates can change, but he recommends checking the prices of some other vendors. He would not mind paying more if the service is acceptable.

Ms. Bohanan asked if we should let Latham know if we check prices of other vendors. After consulting with Mr. Reid, Mayor Eady suggested we informally conduct some market research to find out what rate structures other vendors have.

Mr. Holt pointed out that the city has dealt with this issue in the past. The last time Latham asked for a price increase, they were advised then that a price increase would not go into effect until the next fiscal year, which coincides with the term of the contract. Mr. Holt has no concerns about checking prices of other vendors but pointed out that when they asked for price increase previously, research was done at that time, and Latham had the lowest prices.

Mr. Holt asked how Latham charges for recycling services. Mayor Eady stated they have advised us that about 20% of the customers participate in recycling each week. They check what they pickup to ensure it is not contaminated, then deliver it to Pratt Industries in Conyers for processing. If there is any market value to the materials Latham gets a credit and passes that on to the City of Oxford. The credit has historically been minimal.

Ms. McCanless agrees with Mr. Wearing concerning the level of service, and with Mr. Eady concerning the timing of the requests. She believes it may not be a bad thing for Latham to know the city is putting out the work for bids. They may adjust their requests as a result.

Mayor Eady advised that Latham has been asked what the savings would be if recycling is discontinued. They advised it would only save \$.50 per household to do so.

Ms. Williams agrees with Mr. Wearing about the service quality. She would like for the research to include service information so that we can compare service costs across companies and determine if we are getting the best deal.

Mayor Eady requested that Matt Pepper and Jody Reid move forward with the market research and report their findings back to the City Council.

#### **6. Town Center Development Discussion**

Mayor Eady would like to table this discussion until after the COVID-19 pandemic is over. Some additional discussion also needs to happen with the Downtown Development Authority before bringing the issue to the City Council, and they are not meeting in March.

#### **7. Whatcoat Street Improvements (Attachment D)**

The FY2020 Capital Budget includes \$300,000 to make improvements to Whatcoat Street. A first draft of a concept plan provides details. This issue has been in discussion since 2013 or 2014. The drawing is overlaying an aerial photograph. The black lines are existing property lines and features in the landscape, including changes made to Pierce Street and part of Whatcoat Street. The proposed changes to Whatcoat Street are noted in pink and the items that will be moving are noted in red. The current plan has the sidewalk terminating at the Whatcoat Building. Further discussion is needed on the extension of the sidewalk to George Street. The plan also includes realigning George Street and Whatcoat Street to create a perpendicular intersection, which will eliminate some asphalt and allow the city to create some green space or use it for something else. A sidewalk from George Street to the Post Office is also included.

Mr. Windham advised he would like to look at the plan on the ground before commenting. Mr. Wearing, Ms. Bohanan, Ms. McCanless and Ms. Williams agreed with Mr. Windham. Mr. Wearing has a question about the trajectory of one of the sidewalks. Ms. McCanless questioned who the parking spaces are for and what their installation will change. She likes the plan to realign George Street and Whatcoat Street and get rid of some asphalt. Ms. Bohanan questioned whether Oxford College should be involved in helping to finance these changes. Mr. Holt had no comment.

Mike Ready, who sat on a committee to restart this process last Fall, stated that the Council has reviewed several proposals over the last several years, and he feels the current proposal is the best one to move forward with.

8. **City Welcome Sign Project** (Attachment E)

The FY2020 Capital Budget includes \$60,000 to construct a welcome sign and make improvements to the city-owned lot located at 6153 Emory Street. Mayor Eady acknowledged that the materials provided may not have been the easiest to understand. However, this is another project that has been discussed in the past. The city has obtained three bids that vary in price based on materials to be used and method of construction. He recognizes that the City Council may or may not want to go with the lowest bid due to the Council's preferred construction method and materials. He mentioned that Designed Installations is a company the city has worked with before, and the quality of their work is known. They restored the gate at the cemetery which was built in honor of Mayor Eady's great grandfather. However, they are also the highest bidder.

Mr. Holt asked for confirmation that the city has worked with Designed Installations before. Mayor Eady responded that they had built a speed table for the city. He commented that they are always high, and he does not see much difference between their design and the mid-priced design (Cardoza).

Ms. Williams agreed with Mr. Holt's comments. Mr. Holt asked for confirmation that the sign would be made of stone. Mayor Eady asked Matt Pepper to comment on the contact he has had with Cardoza. Mr. Pepper stated that they do have adequate liability insurance, and they provided samples of previous work they have done.

Ms. McCanless stated that the samples provided by Cardoza appear to show very fine stonework, and their bid is a great bid that she would be in favor of. Mr. Holt and Mr. Wearing recommended that city staff confirm the samples and references Cardoza provided to verify their legitimacy and the quality of their work. Ms. Bohanan agreed with verifying Cardoza's work and references.

Mr. Wearing advised he would check Cardoza's samples and references if Matt could provide them to him. He also asked if the sign is supposed to be like the cemetery sign, which Mayor Eady confirmed. Mr. Wearing asked if a decision has been made for placement of the sign. Mayor Eady advised Mr. Reid and Mr. Pepper had marked off a possible spot with flags but the final decision has not been made. He recommended that the Council members go by and look at the flag placement.

Mr. Windham feels that city staff should always ask for references and samples of previous work when obtaining bids. He does not feel that we can make a decision on this issue until Cardoza's work and references are checked.

Mayor Eady asked the City Council to also look at the lettering options.



9. **SR 81 Sidewalk Study** (Attachment F)

The FY2020 Capital Budget includes \$100,000 to repair existing sidewalks located along SR 81 and carry out a study to install a sidewalk along SR 81 from Soule Street to the northern city limits. Jordan Engineering provided a rough cost estimate in 2017 for this work, however, he is not in a position to take the work right now. Staff asked Keck & Wood to provide a quote to complete a concept plan to construct a sidewalk along SR 81. Keck & Wood provided a quote of \$4,500 and a sample of what the finished product would look like.

Mr. Holt stated that he is not in favor of doing more studies. He feels that the city needs to issue a contract for the work to get it done. Mr. Windham agreed with Mr. Holt and stated that the City Council should vote whether or not to have the work done before deciding on the quote from Keck and Wood for the concept plan. Mayor Eady stated that he considered the vote on the quote from Keck & Wood to be the vote on whether to authorize the work. But he does not have a problem with clearly including the decision to authorize the work in the vote.

10. **Stop Sign Replacement Project** (Attachment G)

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) awarded the city a \$20,000 grant to upgrade its stop signs and posts (113 total existing). The grant funds require a 30% match, which makes the total cost \$26,000. The city issued a Request for Proposals for the project and received four (4) bids. The bids are based on a cost per sign. If the City Council is comfortable with the low bid, we can move forward based on staff's recommendation of awarding the contract for this work to the lowest bidder, Brown's Asphalt Maintenance, Inc. for \$21,675. The city could then negotiate with them for additional signs. Or if the City Council prefers, staff can contact each of the bidders to see if the cost is lower per sign if more signs are added.

Mr. Holt recommended that the city award the contract to the lowest bidder and negotiate with them for additional signs. Ms. McCanless asked if the signs to be placed with the speed humps on E. Soule Street/Williams Road could be included. Mayor Eady confirmed that these signs could be included.

**Mr. Holt made a motion to adjourn at 8:53 p.m. Mr. Windham seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (7/0).**

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia Brooks  
City Clerk/Treasurer