



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE OXFORD MAYOR AND COUNCIL
EMERGENCY CALLED MEETING
THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2020 – 7:00 PM
VIA TELECONFERENCE**

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

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

APPOINTED/STAFF PRESENT:

Matt Pepper – City Manager
Marcia Brooks – City Clerk/Treasurer
Stacey Mullen – Deputy City Clerk
Jody Reid – Utility Superintendent
Dave Harvey – Police Chief
David Strickland – City Attorney

NOT PRESENT: Avis Williams – Councilmember

OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Ready, Art Vinson, Laurie Vinson, Laura Gafnea, James and Adrienne Waddey, Sonia

Teleconference # 1-650-215-5226, Access Code 145489731; 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. Call to Order, Mayor David S. Eady**
- 2. Roll Call of Council Members, Mayor David S. Eady**
- 3. Roll Call of Attendees, Mayor David S. Eady**
- 4. City of Oxford Emergency Declaration and Ordinance (Attachment B)**
Mayor Eady stated that since the Council's March 23rd meeting, the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) provided a model declaration of a state of emergency to cities and recommended that cities adopt this declaration with any adjustments needed for their jurisdictions. The declaration contains requirements for staying home and is more restrictive than the requirements put in place by Governor Kemp on March 23rd. The model document was based on the best advice from health professionals, Georgia Department of

Public Health, and Emory University. A proposed declaration for Oxford was drafted based on this information.

Last night Newton County Board of Commissioners and the City of Covington voted on and passed declarations based on language Athens-Clarke County used that is much more descriptive and detailed on what is permitted and prohibited. In the interest of being unified in Newton County with our approach to preventing the spread of COVID-19, Mayor Eady recommended uniformity with the other Newton County declarations. Several drafts have been worked on since last night, and adjustments have been made by attorneys.

GMA arranged a conference call for mayors Monday morning in which Dr. Carlos Del Rio from Emory University shared very dire predictions if some drastic changes in behavior did not occur. Also, the Chief Medical Officer of Piedmont Healthcare advised that if drastic measures were not taken soon, Piedmont Newton would very quickly be filled to capacity and run out of room to treat patients. The voluntary shelter in place recommendations up to this point do not give law enforcement officers authority to give people gathered together a citation when they are practicing social distancing to disperse,

The proposed declaration ensures that the City of Oxford is doing everything in its power to slow the spread of COVID-19 so that our local hospital is not overwhelmed by requiring people to stay at home when possible, to not gather in groups of ten (10) or more people, and to practice social distancing with others.

The proposed order:

- prohibits public and private gatherings beyond immediate household or social cohort.
- allows residents to leave their homes for essential activities, which are defined in the document.
- prohibits non-essential businesses and non-essential travel as defined in the order.

The City Council does not want to prohibit people from going outside, walking the trails, etc. However, people must practice social distancing when in public, and cannot gather in groups of ten (10) or more.

Mr. Windham agreed with implementing the order. Mr. Wearing approved the order and also emphasized the importance of the City of Oxford being unified on this issue with the other government entities in Newton County.

Ms. Bohanan asked how Oxford's declaration will work, since Newton County already has a declaration in place. Mayor Eady stated that each city has its own authority to regulate within its city limits. The county's order would apply in unincorporated areas of the county. If Oxford does not adopt its own declaration, the county's declaration would apply, but cities are being encouraged to take care of their communities so that the counties can focus on the unincorporated areas. Mayor Eady also added that the proposed declaration for Oxford has an ending date of April 20th which is longer than Covington's and Newton County's

declarations. That is the date of the Council's monthly work session, and the date can be extended at that time if needed.

Ms. McCanless agreed with Oxford's declaration being in line with other Newton County jurisdictions' declarations, but she agrees with putting the longer termination date in so that Oxford will not have to call another meeting to extend it. Mr. Holt agreed with Ms. McCanless and was also pleased that Newton County changed theirs from a curfew to shelter in place.

Mayor Eady expressed his appreciation to David Strickland for working on multiple drafts in very short order for Oxford. Mr. Strickland thanked Mayor Eady and advised he did not have any further comment. Mayor Eady commented on the cooperation between the jurisdictions in Newton County in this effort.

The proposed ordinance will not impact city operations. The city has already implemented procedures to limit exposure from customers and to practice social distancing with each other.

Mr. Windham made a motion to adopt the declaration as presented. Ms. McCanless seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).

5. Approval of Billing Modifications (Attachment C)

Stacey Mullen stated that staff needs a procedure for dealing with customers during the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff proposes to waive the \$25 delinquent fee normally assessed on the 25th of each month for March and April, waive the 10% penalty on unpaid balances for April, and suspend service disconnections until further notice. Staff would reevaluate conditions later and determine if these measures need to be extended into May.

Mayor Eady advised the City Council that the purpose of these recommended measures is to avoid penalizing people who are experiencing economic hardships during this time. The March bills were sent out at the end of February before COVID-19 became a major issue, so it is not recommended that March 10% penalties be waived.

Mr. Windham recommended development of a recovery plan for how customers will be allowed to catch up their accounts by April 20. Mr. Holt suggested sending out a notice to all customers advising them there will be no disconnection right now, but customers should pay what they can and will have the opportunity to enter into payment arrangements when conditions return to normal. Mr. Wearing agreed.

Mayor Eady agreed and stated he would work with staff to come up with some recommendations for contingency plans by April 20.

Mr. Wearing made a motion to adopt the staff recommendations. Mr. Windham seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).

Mayor Eady asked if anyone from the community had any questions or comments. Art Vinson asked what the communications plan for these requirements is, with the thought in mind of easing the enforcement burden. Mayor Eady advised we can send out a “plain speak” notice to all members of the community. The City Council members agreed with this plan. The information will also be placed on our website and Facebook page and sent to the newspaper.

Mr. Holt suggested having our police officers distribute the information. Mayor Eady advised the goal of this is information and education. However, Ms. Bohanan cautioned against the police officers having such contact with people. Mr. Holt agreed this could be a problem.

Marcia Brooks advised she would take the lead on working on these communication items with staff and keep the Mayor and City Council updated.

Mr. Windham asked if the city’s police officers have masks. Mayor Eady advised that they indicated Monday night that they had some. Police are taking a very conservative approach and trying to inform and educate on these requirements as much as possible. They are only taking action for blatant violations, and then trying to avoid arrests and only issue citations.

Mayor Eady asked Laura Gafnea about the status of students still on site at Oxford College and if she has any questions. Ms. Gafnea advised they will be moving about fifty (50) remaining students to the Atlanta campus this weekend. They will be moved to the Clairmont campus in single person apartments with single access bathrooms. Emory has been following Atlanta’s shelter-in-place order on the Atlanta and Oxford campuses. The only major difference is the ending date, but she anticipates that Atlanta’s requirements will be extended. Faculty and staff are practicing social distancing. Mayor Eady asked Ms. Gafnea to share the declaration information with the Emory police officers.

Adrienne Waddey stated that she has shared the information from Newton County and Covington with the college’s leadership and will also share the Oxford information, and they are available to assist the city if needed.

Mr. Wearing made a motion to adjourn at 7:57 p.m. Ms. McCanless seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously (6/0).

Respectfully Submitted,

Marcia Brooks
City Clerk/Treasurer