

## **OXFORD PLANNING COMMISSION**

### **MINUTES**

**FEBRUARY 6, 2024**

The regular monthly meeting of the Oxford Planning Commission was called to order by the Chairman, Norman Bell, on Tuesday, February 6, 2024, at 2:00 p.m., in the meeting room of the Oxford Community Services Building.

Other commission members in attendance were Steve Mroczek, Lucy Garliauskas, and Bruce Beglin, along with Town Manager, Cheryl Lewis.

A workshop meeting of the Oxford Planning Commission was held on Thursday, January 25, 2024, in the meeting room of the Oxford Community Services Building, to review and address environmental and resilience concerns to the updated version of the Town of Oxford's Comprehensive Plan.

Manager Lewis began the discussion of this night's meeting by noting that at the last regularly scheduled meeting of December 5, 2023, the final draft of the cannabis legislation was presented. Some discussion of the language had taken place, but the commission determined that what was written by the State could be adopted and sent to the Commissioners as a recommendation. Manager Lewis noted that this month's meeting would focus on the review of the Oxford 2020 Maryland Sustainable Community Designation, for the five year plan. She explained that the town joined the sustainable community program back in 2014, at which time she had written up a plan and that the town was able to get into the program. The reason for joining the program was because members of the community wanted the town to start to receive grant funding and, as pointed out by Manager Lewis, one could not apply for many grants at the Maryland State level unless one was already in the Maryland Sustainable Community program. The grant monies received through this program were used for the rehabilitation of The Mews building. The town received hundreds of thousands of dollars for The Mews project, as well as various mini grants, which have been used in financially aiding such businesses as the Robert Morris Inn, the bookstore, the Oxford Market, the area restaurants, and Oxford Museum. All were struggling businesses back in 2014. Manager Lewis stated that in 2020, she had sent the State a letter in which she described how grant money that the town had received had resulted in vastly improving many of the commercial businesses in town. She explained that part of the idea behind the program is that if you start to improve something in one area, it aids in improving the whole area, as was the case with the improvement of The Mews building. She further noted that grant money was easier to get if one had a sustainable community designation and that there are some things that could not be had at all if one did not have a sustainable program, adding that to be in the program, one had to be designated. Another selling point in the town's sustainable community plan is apartment/rental housing. Currently the town has zero apartment buildings but there are businesses that support rental housing, above and behind their business buildings. Chairman Bell asked if there was any downside to the program. Manager Lewis again stated that if the town is not in the program, the town will lose opportunities that would otherwise be open to the town. She added that though it does take some staff, the application only needs to be done every 5 years and that the only downside to it is that someone has to do it. The other downside

for the community is that no one is watching the economics of the community. Manager Lewis believed that economic development of the community is the financial responsibility of the government. There needs to be a need now to look at the accomplishments of the past 4 years and then what the rest of the needs are going to be. She added that going forward the commission can get input, or not, from the businesses or Oxford Business Association. She believed that the local businesses are always going to need help and highlighted that the marinas are always in need of something, and one never knows when a disaster may strike. She suggested that the members walk around town and see if there are commercial spaces that aren't being utilized. She also asked that the members read up on the community sustainability program, make notes on it, as well as making notes as they are out walking around town. Chairman Bell asked if the Planning Commission needed to interact with the Oxford Business Association or the Oxford Historic District Commission. Manager Lewis responded that was up to the commission to decide. She again asked the members to just look at two main elements: 1) to identify that the plan looks reasonable and 2) what the needs are as they look around town. She added that the commission, if they wanted to, could go to the Oxford Business Association and let them know that they are starting to update the plan. She again stressed that it matters having sustainable ability and one needs a backup plan, especially in the case of a business that may be starting to fail, especially if that business is one that supports a need in the community.

The members all agreed there was no downside to it. Ms. Garliauskas asked if Manager Lewis had looked into other community grants. Manager Lewis responded she had looked into the Mainstreet Maryland grant, but it had some criteria that was difficult to meet and that she went for the one that would give the town the most funding.

The meeting ended with Chairman Bell stating that the members could discuss this further at their next meeting. Manager Lewis stressed that the plan needed to be finalized by the end of the year. She added that the Comprehensive Plan was being worked on and that she will have something for the members to review soon.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Willoughby

Assistant Clerk