

## State of the City 2008

This time a year ago our greatest concern was how annexation, approved as of December 11, 2006, would unfold. City staff did a good job of execution, because sound planning, on the part of department heads and the board, preceded it. We budgeted for specific increases in services and are adding, and will continue to add, those services accordingly. By virtue of this annexation, the largest in Oxford's history, population grew by 50% (now approximately 20,000) and its land area by 30% (now 16 square miles). A smaller but still significant achievement was living through a pleasant and hassle-free first year of the smoking ban in public places.

A department - by - department description and report on each city department is as follows:

### Government

Oxford operates under a Code Charter, governed by a Mayor and Board of Aldermen. The Mayor serves as chairman of the board and spokesperson for the city, and the Mayor's position is full-time with an annual salary of \$65,000. The Mayor also operates in an executive capacity, although it is the board that authorizes by vote all executive and financial decisions. The board consists of seven aldermen, six of whom each represent one of the city's six wards, and the seventh serves at-large. The position of alderman is part-time and receives an annual salary of \$12,000. The board is responsible for establishing or authorizing policy and creating and upholding all city ordinances. The mayor and aldermen are

elected to four-year terms by voters who are registered in Oxford.

The Mayor and Board of Aldermen are the fiduciary authority for the city's general fund and its two municipal enterprises, which are Oxford Electric Department and Oxford Water & Sewer Department. These municipal enterprises are funded entirely through the rates and fees of their respective operations, while general fund revenues are derived through sales tax (36.03% of the budget's revenue) and ad valorem taxes (23.41%). There is no commingling of general fund tax money with utility rates and fee revenues, and vice versa. Fees for governmental services (13.91%), and revenue from licenses, permits, fines and miscellaneous charges make up the rest (26.65%) of the general fund budget, all of which make possible those municipal services which ultimately benefit the citizenry. The city's general fund budget for FY 2007-08 is approximately \$18 million.

The work of the city clerk and tax collector's office, and the human resources department, is not always as visible to citizens as it is to the mayor and board, but virtually all the financial and labor-related administration of the city is done by this staff of seven people, and of course is critically related to the degree of excellence of all city services.

All of the city services are made possible by the city's professional staff of 350 employees -- whose combined wages and salaries make up 78% of the city's budget -- in addition to scores of citizen volunteers who serve on boards, commissions and committees. The board emphasizes professional development at every level, and last year the city spent approximately \$62,000 on employee training.

## Human Resources

This board works very hard to extend services without raising taxes, or, in this case, increasing payroll dollars, something very difficult to do in the climate of growth we have experienced. Over the past five years the total number of city employees has increased significantly, but remain well below other growth indicators.

Human Resources director Al Hope met a number of goals for '07. And the HR department will maintain many of the programs Mr. Hope established such as: updating the policy handbook, establishing a new employee orientation, certification programs, service awards program, direct deposit for employees, retiree Medicare eligible program and increased training.

## Tourism and Parks & Recreation

This past year reconstruction of the four tennis courts at Avent Park, painting the interior and exterior of the Activity Center, construction of the new recreational facility of Oxford-Lafayette Fields, all took place or were begun. This board has budgeted \$5.3 million for this facility, and wishes, in the best interests of the Oxford-Lafayette community, for the facility to provide maximum use as the best facility it can possibly be. The city hired Brad Freeman in March '07 to plan and develop Oxford-Lafayette Fields, which has been designed and is now under construction to meet budget targets and opening deadlines. Also completed are the design and bid of Phases I and II of the Lamar Park improvements, and construction is now beginning. Budgeting has been done for the design of three pocket parks in

the City using the “old dog pound,” Garden Terrace, and Rivers Hill properties.

We commend the Tourism Council and the Tourism staff for making strides in 2007. Their numbers are very impressive. Hotel-motel revenue grew 2% in 2007, food and beverage tax revenue grew by 5.7%, and sales tax revenue by 9.3%. Absent annexation, the sales tax is estimated to have increased 5.5%. To whatever extent the slow-down in development, as described later in this report, has taken place in Oxford, it so far does not seem to have affected the rest of the local economy.

In 2007 the Oxford Tourism Council held the inaugural Oxford Town BBQ Throw-down, which was a successful addition to the events calendar. One of the projects for 2008 includes helping host the September 26 Presidential Debate, in conjunction with the University of Mississippi. Tourism and Recreation are governed by their respective boards, the Oxford Tourism Council, with seven board members, and the Oxford Park Commission, with five commissioners. The Tourism Council has 10 employees with a \$1 million annual budget. The Park Commission, including Oxford Swimming Pool and the RSVP program, has a staff of 20 people and a \$1.3 million budget.

#### Public Works – Water, Sewer, Streets

We thank the water and sewer departments for operating our waste system at an adequate environmental standard and keeping the public’s water clean; the street department for maintaining and improving our streets and sidewalks, the sanitation department for the proper disposal of waste and

care of the environment through recycling; the electric department for keeping us cool when it's hot, warm when it's cold, and our lights, stoves, and water heaters humming.

Water and sewer expansion for many years has been our most reliable indicator of growth in the area. New water meters in 2007 showed a growth of 21.4% due to annexation. Since 2000, new meter installations increased by 45.6%. Oxford Water & Sewer employs 36 people with a \$7.7 million budget.

In 2007 the Public Works Department completed or got underway a number of infrastructure improvements, including the following:

- Country Club sidewalk and associated drainage improvements
- Sewer rehab on Bramlett and Sisk Avenues
- South Lamar / Hwy 6 roundabouts
- Various resurfacing projects
- Additional lane on Univ. Ave. at S. 18th St. million.
- Completed construction of Pathway project Phase I
- Began construction of 6.5 million gallons per day Wastewater Treatment Plant.

In the coming year the City has plans for a number of additional infrastructure improvements for 2008, which include the following:

- Replace sewer beneath University Avenue from S. 18<sup>th</sup> St. to S. Lamar a project that likely will include both underground electrical and tree planting – as suggested in Vision 2020
- Install water & sewer in the newly annexed Meadowview area
- Install fire protection lines in Garden Terrace Phase I (newly annexed)

- Replace water lines on College Hill between Lamar Park & W Jackson
- Relay water line from Waller Funeral Home to Links area (annexed)
- Install 8" water line in Wilson Rd area
- Add well at N. Industrial Park
- Construct sidewalk on Sisk from Bramlett to Oxford Conference Center
- Sewer improvements in Ridgeland subdivision
- Begin \$11 million wastewater plant expansion.

The city also worked in conjunction with Lafayette County to complete a transportation study, and fully funded preliminary engineering for Toby Tubby Parkway, which is now underway.

### Solid Waste & Recycling

The Solid Waste Department continues to operate efficiently and Amberlyn Liles reports that at the current rate we will have curbside city-wide this summer. Oxford Recycling had revenues of \$93,581 in 2007, an increase over 2006 attributable to increased volume, increased revenue from recyclables and considerably greater savings from tipping fees.

Oxford Sanitation collects and disposes of waste throughout Oxford with commercial service and two residential pick-ups weekly, performs recycling service, and maintains Oxford and St. Peters' Cemetery as well as right-of-ways throughout the city with a staff of 59 and an annual budget of \$2.1 million. Residential sanitation rates have not increased since 1994.

### Electric Department

The Electric Department assumed solid waste billing services for

newly annexed areas. OED had a 4.2% increase in customers, consistent with recent years, a difference that, according to superintendant Lynn Robbins, reflects many system improvements, notably the downtown underground project. They are also preparing to rebuild the substation on Old Taylor Road, with a projected expense of \$1.1 million. OED provides billing and collection services for water, sewer, and sanitation, and has 36 employees with a \$17 million budget, more than 80% of which goes directly to the cost of power purchased from TVA.

### Education

The Oxford Separate School District continues to excel and progress. The facility expansion program is under execution, as the Della Davidson School opened in 2007. As capital improvements and expansions continue at the High School, where there is a continuing focus on improving graduation and drop-out rates. All schools are performing well and stabilized funding from the State is a relief. The Oxford Separate School District current 2008 budget is \$38,471,860 with 267 teachers and 503 full-time and part-time staff serving 3416 students this year. At this time pre-K – 1<sup>st</sup> grade is at Bramlett Elementary; grades 2 & 3 at Oxford Elementary; 4 & 5 at Della Davidson; 6 – 8 at Oxford Middle and Central and 9 – 12 at Oxford High School.

### Healthcare

This year has been a great year for the North Mississippi Baptist Memorial Hospital. This past fiscal year they had 9,263 inpatient visits,

61,056 outpatient visits and 23,343 emergency room visits for a total of 93,662 visits. All of these visits were made possible by the 1,059 staff, 78 physicians on active staff, 7 consulting physicians, and 25 courtesy physicians at the hospital. There were 1,011 births this past year and we are looking forward to serving our newly arrived citizens of Oxford. North Mississippi Baptist Memorial Hospital has gained a number of awards and accreditations including being a Bariatric Center of Excellence as determined by the American Society for Bariatric Surgery, Sleep Lab accreditation by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, and Acute Rehab accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehab Facilities.

### Volunteer Service in Oxford

City government is abetted by so many volunteers who serve in various ways. The Planning Commission is comprised of seven volunteer commissioners, akin to the five people who serve on the board of the Oxford Park Commission. The Historic Preservation Commission (nine members), the Oxford Square Historic Preservation Commission (seven members), the Oxford Tree Board (five members), the Pathways Commission (seven members), the Oxford Tourism Council (seven members), the Election Commission (three members) are all established by ordinance and/or state law and interact with City staff. All these commission members are appointed by the Mayor and Board of Aldermen.

The Oxford Separate School District has five board members, three

who live in the city and are appointed by the Mayor and Board of Aldermen, and two elected at-large in the District outside the City. The school board has its own taxing authority. The Oxford Housing Commission has five board members, appointed by the mayor and board, and operates strictly through federal funding and its own operational revenue.

I commend the board of aldermen, the tree board, the tourism council, the park commission, the school board, the housing authority, the emergency management committee, the humane society, the library, the fire and police departments, city court, and the planning commission for their work in preserving Oxford's character and improving our quality of life, including preservation; care of animals; fire protection, crime prevention, and disaster preparedness; and the provision of education, information, and recreation.

We can not say thank you enough to the many wonderful volunteers in our community, and all that they accomplish.

### Housing, Planning and Development

Oxford Housing Authority operates five public housing facilities with 312 rental units -- C. B. Webb Townhouse (128 units); Riverside (100); Wayne Johnson Homes (55); Laurel Grove (22); and Willow Knoll (12). OHA has a total of thirteen full-time and part-time people on its staff. These housing units supply much-needed affordable housing, but more units are needed, and much more work must be done to accommodate middle-income working families' housing needs.

LOU - HOME continues to work on one of our community's most vexing issues, affordable housing. Dramatic real estate and housing inflation, fueled by an unprecedented demand for second-home condominiums in the area, have made it difficult and in many cases impossible for middle-income families to purchase traditional middle-income homes. Many area large employers report that approximately 50% of employees live outside Lafayette County. The lack of affordable housing impairs job growth in the largest job sector, the service industry, hampering local economic development, and, due to increased commuting traffic, compounding infrastructure needs. Meanwhile global trends such as climate change and the declines and disruptions in oil and other energy-related industries create a hastening need for more local sustainable development. Urban design here, however, when it needs to contract, instead is sprawling. Federal and state law need to make possible for local communities incentives and requirements for sustainable development that do not now sufficiently exist.

As a new organization, LOU – HOME deserves singling out for the remarkable job it has done attempting to fill the extreme need we have here for affordable housing. Establishing the Community Green subdivision is an incredible ambition that many have doubted would succeed. Like Andy Kennedy's basketball team, they continue to make us believers, mainly through plain hard work.

Word around town is that Oxford's building boom has peaked, with speculation that as many as 1,500 homes and condos are presently on the market. The City's 2007 Building Department figures corroborate this, with a 26% decline in new construction value, estimated annually from building

permits. However, a similar decline occurred three years ago only to be followed by a dramatic increase the subsequent year, so it is too early to determine whether this a one-year blip or the beginning of a trend.

The Planning Department enhanced historic preservation through the establishment of two additional historic districts, the expansion of two existing districts, the creation of an additional commission (Oxford Square Historic Preservation Commission), and the hiring of Tiffany Hatcher as a historic preservation consultant. The City applied for and was awarded National Register of Historic Places designation for the North Lamar historic district.

Katrina Hourin was hired as Assistant Planner to fulfill increased demands in the areas of Planning, Preservation, and Development. Tim Akers and Mrs. Hourin worked hard amending the landscape ordinance in an effort to sustain Oxford's tree canopy.

The department completed Phase I of the Pathway project, received notice of grant award from MDOT for \$2.4 million for Phase II, and established the Pathways Commission, which has done excellent work under the enthusiastic leadership of its chairman, Mike Mossing.

A public transit grant was received from MDOT to the City for Oxford, Lafayette County and the University in the amount of \$451,000 for capital expenditures, with an approximate anticipated additional \$325,000 from MDOT for operational costs to follow, and an \$857,000 capital enhancement from a federal earmark, all to be used in planning and execution by the newly established L-O-U transit commission, whose objectives for this year include purchasing buses and other capital equipment, including a facility; procurement of a management company; finalizing routes and schedules, developing a marketing strategy, and hiring

staff. We look forward to the new Board of Supervisors appointing three people to this commission so it can begin to do the work now urgently required of it.

We also must acknowledge the many entities that make Oxford function and prosper, from our largest employers, such as the University of Mississippi, Whirlpool, Baptist Hospital, and NMRC, to the hard-working mom-and-pop entrepreneurs, and the many restaurants and shops that stimulate Oxford's tourism economy and provide excellent choices to residents.

### Public Safety and Municipal Court

In discussing public safety it first must be said that firefighters and police officers always accept a risk to their own safety in order to protect us citizens, and for this our gratitude is not quantifiable. The crime rate here remains less than half the national average, and violent crime statistics are even lower.

Reform measures were initiated in 2007 toward the so-called "culture of alcohol" that include: a vastly improved alcohol ordinance that requires greater responsibility on the part of businesses that sell and/or serve alcohol, including a keg registration requirement; enhanced law enforcement through the creation of an alcohol task force, now staffed and operational; a new community service program available as a sentencing option for alcohol ordinance violators, set to begin next month; recommendations to the state legislature to toughen penalties for DUIs and the use of false IDs; and support from the City for the University of Mississippi's BASICS alcohol

counseling program through a federal appropriation of approximately \$335,000.

In 2007 Oxford Fire Department made a record 841 inspections and hosted 1100 different young people who visited the station and learned about fire prevention. The department answered 972 calls, of which 14 involved structure fires, 22 cooking fires, 19 vehicle fires, and 54 outdoor fires. OFD provides fire protection on a contractual basis for the University of Mississippi, which last year accounted 346 calls. Oxford firefighters distributed over 10,428 pieces of educational information during Fire Prevention Week to young people at Oxford City Schools, Lafayette County Schools and North Mississippi Regional Center

Municipal Court has been busy (see above). Due to the ongoing effort to ramp up court collections an additional clerk was hired. The municipal court judge, the city prosecutor, defender, and court clerk all have difficult jobs and we appreciate the work they have done during this time of growth and stress. The court collected approximately \$200,000 in past-due, uncollected fines outstanding to municipal court.

It is impossible to think of the progress made in this community over the past year without acknowledging our many not-for-profit non-governmental organizations, such as the United Way, Interfaith Compassion Ministries, Boys and Girls Scouts, the Boys and Girls Club, Salvation Army, Family Crisis Center, Red Cross, and The Pantry – to name just a few. As long as I am in office, I will continue to advocate use of the old Armory

property as a site for a nice, large, shared facility as a central location for many of these local human service organizations, as recommended in a study of the space needs of these groups, conducted, on a volunteer basis, by Noel Wilkin. Such a facility would facilitate for its clients easier access to these services, and serve to enhance support for these groups that do so many things that, were it not for them, would become government's responsibility. They deserve this support from the city and the county. This facility also would make a statement about Oxford-Lafayette County befitting our reputation as both a quality-of-life and a progressive and responsible community.

### Looking Forward

While residential development has slowed, commercial growth in Oxford continues. Two new hotels are set to begin construction in 2008, and the new Oxford Galleria retail center and Inn at Ole Miss will open in 2008.

The recodification of Oxford ordinances is scheduled for completion and accessible at [www.oxfordms.net](http://www.oxfordms.net) by March, and curbside recycling operational city-wide this summer. Oxford Lafayette Fields are on schedule for soccer fields in the fall, and possibly public transit as early as the fall, too, and we hope to have the South Lamar Historic District accepted on the National Register of Historic Places by then, too.

The aldermen and I know the clock is ticking on this administration, and that we have a year and a half to accomplish these and a few other things – solving downtown parking, for one; initiating the Phase II Pathway

project, including the Old Taylor Rd. pedestrian bridge; reviewing the storm water & erosion control ordinance; taking another look at the annexation study to see whether we might pick up a few areas without having to subsidize a completely new annexation study; ensuring that the West Jackson – Hwy 6 interchange is under construction; erecting a modest memorial to public safety in the name of Laura Treppendahl near the Jackson Avenue pedestrian bridge; initiating the construction of a new animal shelter – to name some of them. We are thrilled that the University was chosen to host the first presidential debate, and know the City has much work to do in preparation for it.

In the past year the city had a rewarding year working with citizens, and with our state legislative delegation and our federal congressional delegation, both of which have been very responsive to our needs and very cooperative with local elected officials. In 2007 our preservation and environmental efforts have been rewarded, as we received, for the tenth consecutive year, Tree City USA status; were named the Local Government Recycler of the Year by the Miss. Recycling Coalition; received federal designation for Oxford as a Preserve America Community and for the North Lamar District on the National Register of Historic Places; and received the Scenic Community of Mississippi Award from the Mississippi Urban Council.

We have every reason to believe 2008 will be at least as fruitful as 2007 has been, and I will close by thanking again city staff for their dedication and service, and this board for its integrity, for leading openly, for its hard work, assertive leadership, and their earnest and candid

communication with so many citizens. The easy course of action for local elected officials is to avoid controversy by doing nothing, by quietly pacifying certain special interests and otherwise keeping out of sight. This board has never shied from doing the work it is supposed to do, using this board room as the public forum it is supposed to be, sometimes exposing our human faults in the process. We thank Oxford's many good citizens for their interest, critical input, and support.