



## MEETING SYNOPSIS | Advisory Council

**October 24, 2019**

The following is a summary of the third meeting of the Elevate Advisory Council. The attendance sheet is attached to this summary. The agenda and other meeting materials can be found on the Elevate Tuscaloosa website under Advisory Council > Meetings.

A discussion was held on the following topics.

### **Welcome**

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The meeting was held at the Houston H. Harte Center on the campus of Stillman College. Dr. Cynthia Warrick (Stillman College President) and Dr. Mark McCormick (Vice President of Academic Affairs) welcomed the Advisory Council and thanked Elevate staff for the opportunity to host the third Elevate Advisory Council meeting.

### **Progress Report**

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Mayor Walt Maddox (City of Tuscaloosa) reminded members of the monthly garbage fee reduction that took effect October 1 and will be reflected in the November billing cycle.

This year, 54 new students were enrolled in the Tuscaloosa City Schools Pre-K program and 6 new teachers were hired. Dr. Michael Daria (Tuscaloosa City Schools Superintendent) previously informed the Mayor that for the first time since the Pre-K initiative began, all children who applied for pre-k in the Tuscaloosa City Schools were able to attend.

In 2020, the city's funding of the Tuscaloosa City Schools Summer Learning Academies will go into effect, as well as Dual Enrollment Scholarships. The proposal adopted by City Council for the Dual Enrollment Scholarships is to provide high school seniors in Tuscaloosa City Schools with 6 hours of course credit at the local college of their choice: Stillman College, Shelton State, or the University of Alabama. These programs will be administered by the Tuscaloosa City Schools.

Mayor Maddox informed members that 19 of 22 Elevate projects have been initiated. Steven Rumsey (Advisory Council member) asked if there would be a vetting process for considering the cost-benefit analysis of Elevate projects. The Mayor responded that there is a vetting process. For example, Elevate funding for the three education programs is dependent on successful performance metrics provided by the Tuscaloosa City Schools. Mayor Maddox noted that the Advisory Council members were chosen because they are active in the business community and they should evaluate the viability of all Elevate proposals.

A professional feasibility study will be completed for the conference center and athletic and events center; if these projects do not make economic sense, they will not be recommended for

construction. The 2006-2008 conference center feasibility study revealed that a venue could generate a \$0.5 million operating loss. Although the study showed a conference center did not make economic sense at the time, the data indicated that an amphitheater could be successful. The Mayor recognized that some projects may have a higher return on investment, while others may have a higher "ROC" (return on community). The Advisory Council should judge between the two types and make recommendations accordingly.

The Mayor also discussed the items that have been approved by City Council. These can be found on the Elevate Tuscaloosa website under Advisory Council > Meetings (click "View Materials" next to the October 24 meeting date).

## **Subcommittee Updates: Connectivity**

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### **Tuscaloosa National Airport**

David Pass (Connectivity subcommittee member) updated the Advisory Council on the items discussed at the last Connectivity subcommittee meeting. He started by discussing the Tuscaloosa National Airport (TCL), informing members that runway improvements remain top priority. The runway has not been paved since 1995. TCL has seen a dramatic increase in air traffic. In 1995 there were 19 large aircraft operations, and in 2016 there were 455 large aircraft operations. Design work is currently underway with Atkins North America and construction is expected to be complete by August 2020. The city receives \$150,000 in grants from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) each year, and were able to combine three years' worth of grants to generate \$450,000 for the runway design. Estimated construction costs for the project are expected to range \$10-15 million. There are grants pending with the federal government, which could match up to 90%, although that is unlikely.

Karen Brooks (co-chair) asked if the runway improvements would include lengthening the runway. Tera Tubbs (City of Tuscaloosa) responded that lengthening the runway is not included in the current improvements, but is part of a 5-year plan. The current runway is 6,500 feet long, which can accommodate current economic needs. The city's goal is to eventually lengthen the runway to 8,000 feet, but doing so would cost an additional \$10-15 million.

Mr. Pass also discussed improvements to the airport terminal. Terminal improvements are closely tied to recruiting commercial service. One major difference between terminal improvements and runway improvements is the opportunity for partnerships. Sponsorships and private investment for terminal improvements are common and have been used in communities similar to Tuscaloosa.

Ellis Architects is currently consulting with Atkins North America on the design work of the Tuscaloosa Police Department (TPD) Hangar.

Mr. Pass encouraged Advisory Council members and the public to "like" the Tuscaloosa National Airport (TCL) on Facebook to receive project updates and give input.

## **Western Riverwalk**

Mr. Pass turned to the Western Riverwalk extension. Negotiations with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are ongoing, which will affect the project timeline. The design will be similar to the existing Riverwalk. Public safety is important and the subcommittee agreed consideration should be given to the potential redevelopment of the adjacent 125 acres comprising the former Tuscaloosa Country Club site.

## **Northern Riverwalk**

Mr. Pass informed members of the progress of the Northern Riverwalk extension. He discussed how the Randall Family land donation enhances the value of the project by offsetting taxpayers' dollars and providing a good return on investment. The design phase is underway, which includes a trailhead and park.

## **Transit Study**

Lastly, Mr. Pass discussed the transit study. Elevate funding will provide a 20% match on the \$90,000 expected cost. The remaining 80% will be funded by an ALDOT grant. The last transit study was completed about 25 years ago. The study will be modeled off of the recent study completed by the City of Huntsville. PATA will release a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) on October 28, and responses are due November 27. Along with city staff, Mr. Pass, Russell Lawrence, and Bill Ashley (the latter two Advisory Council members) will review the responses to the RFQ and select a firm in December. The transit study is expected to begin in January 2020 and will require about nine months to complete.

## **Subcommittee Updates: Cultural Arts and Tourism**

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### **Bama Theatre**

Gene Poole (Cultural Arts and Tourism subcommittee member) updated the Advisory Council on the items discussed at the last Cultural Arts and Tourism subcommittee meeting. Design work is underway by Ellis Architects and will consist of evaluating existing conditions, including acoustics and lighting. He discussed the goal of attracting new events and performances, and the idea of getting sponsorships. The Arts Council will be responsible for coordinating construction in order to be sensitive to existing programming and the PARA offices located in the building. He also noted how crucial it will be for the Arts Council to fundraise in order to make all recommended improvements to the theatre.

Mayor Maddox said the Arts Council will have to recommend whether to phase construction or to close the theatre in order to complete construction at once. Mr. Poole acknowledged that there are existing rental contracts, but also noted the construction work will be intense and will require significant time.

Sandra Wolfe (Advisory Council member), who serves as the Executive Director of the Arts Council, expressed her hopes for phased construction in order to work with existing events, especially those that involve local youth. Shelley Jones (Advisory Council member) noted the lack of comparable facilities to host the events that use the Bama Theatre.

### **Experiential Learning Center**

Mr. Poole discussed the Experiential Learning Center and the goal to partner the Tuscaloosa Public Library (TPL) and the Children's Hands-on Museum (CHOM) at 315 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The City Council approved final negotiations to purchase the property and the city will close on the building by October 31. Mr. Poole noted the importance of fundraising for this project, with a goal to make the facility equal to or better than the McWane Center in Birmingham. Programming will take priority and dictate space for all partners.

Mayor Maddox thanked city staff, City Council and Judge Robertson (Tuscaloosa County) for their hard work to acquire this property. He echoed Mr. Poole regarding the goal of building an elite facility and the opportunity for investments. He expressed his hopes that TPL and CHOM will invest the proceeds from their existing buildings in this project.

### **Conference Center / Athletic & Events Center**

Mr. Poole discussed the city's need for a conference center. The requests for proposals (RFPs) for a feasibility study are due back November 1. Along with city staff, Don Staley and Heather Dill (Advisory Council members) will evaluate the RFPs and bring back two recommendations to the Cultural Arts and Tourism subcommittee on November 7 to be interviewed.

Mr. Poole noted that the conference center may not produce much profit, but it is necessary for quality of life. David Pass responded that there are many civic groups within the city that desperately need a venue and could be a consistent revenue source. He cited the Rotary Club and their need for a larger venue in order to increase membership and provide for storage.

Jim Page (Advisory Council member) asked what would be encompassed in the feasibility study. Mayor Maddox responded that location, partnerships, operations, and maintenance will all be included in the study. Lee Busby (City Council District 4) asked if the study was tied to any specific locations. Mayor Maddox responded that all locations are up for review. He noted that the often-discussed McFarland Mall site will not be a feasible option, as the conference center will need to be located near restaurants and hotels.

Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) reminded the group that the feasibility study will look at both a conference center and an athletic center, and the possibility that one could be better than the other or there could be a need for both. Mayor Maddox noted one major change since the 2007 conference center feasibility study was completed. At that time, there was no revenue source to offset the debt service on a conference center. The amphitheater was selected instead of the

conference center because the debt could be funded by lodging tax. Now, Elevate revenue can cover the debt service on a venue, and that may change the result of the new feasibility study. Heather Dill also noted the lack of hotel rooms in 2007, and the necessity of at least 250 rooms to solicit major events for a conference center. The increase in hotels downtown since 2007 will play a major role in the feasibility for our market. Mayor Maddox mentioned another reason the amphitheater was financially feasible is that it is located on 15 acres the city owned, making the land cost zero. The cost of the land for a conference center will play a role in the feasibility calculations. The process will be lengthy and will require a lot of due diligence.

## **General Discussion**

Sandra Wolfe and Don Staley will be developing an inventory of Tuscaloosa's unmet needs in the cultural arts and tourism arena. Their ideas will be discussed by the Cultural Arts and Tourism subcommittee in early 2020.

## **Subcommittee Updates: Parks and Recreation**

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### **General Discussion**

Steven Rumsey updated the Advisory Council on the items discussed at the last Parks and Recreation subcommittee meeting. First, he discussed the group's agreement that the parks and recreation discussion is complex and there is a wealth of information and data that are unknown. This will require proceeding slowly and methodically. Although certain projects are ready to advance, many others are not.

### **Tuscaloosa Tennis Center (TTC)**

Mr. Rumsey turned to TTC and Director Mike Goldammer's recommendation to expand the facility, based on an economic argument that the expansion will pay for itself through tournaments and events. The Parks and Recreation subcommittee requested that Mr. Goldammer return next year with the following information: prioritizing improvements, costs of operating and maintaining the expansion, and the uses for additional courts when tournaments are not in session. Mr. Rumsey noted the difficulty of capturing tournaments that are already located in the state and his concern of subsidizing additional maintenance costs if the tournaments do not come here after expanding the facility. Mayor Maddox mentioned that Elevate should examine the possibility of closing tennis courts at other PARA facilities in order to better utilize resources. Don Staley (Advisory Council member), who is also President of Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission, expressed his interest in assisting with recruiting tennis tournaments.

### **McAbee Center**

The vision for the McAbee Center is to be an elite facility for seniors 50+ years. Programming will be a top priority. Questions that remain include programming for both current and future

demographics. The subcommittee is not prepared to recommend improvements for this facility until more information is known.

Mayor Maddox described McAbee as an example of a “return on community” and a facility that will make the community desirable for retired citizens.

### **Additional Discussion**

Gary Minor (Advisory Council member and Executive Director of PARA) spoke about the meeting held by PARA earlier in the week at the McDonald Hughes Community Center. PARA employees and board members provided a presentation, along with printed materials that included data and information about PARA facilities and members (age, zip code, usage, etc.). Mr. Minor informed members he would provide this information to them by email. Lesley Bruinton (Advisory Council member) would like to see PARA's data incorporated into a professional third-party study or survey that can validate it.

Shelley Jones thanked Mr. Minor for holding the meeting, and noted the need for vision and programming for PARA facilities. The presentation compared PARA's funding to similar communities, like Auburn-Opelika. Ms. Jones requested more information about how those organizations are funded. Mayor Maddox discussed the additional funding the city provides in the form of debt service payments it makes on PARA facilities located in the city. In addition, the city pays millions of dollars for operations and maintenance of other recreational facilities, such as the amphitheater, Riverwalk, Government Plaza, and Annette Shelby Park. He also noted how PARA is not funded well by other community partners.

Ms. Bruinton expressed her concern of having funds reserved for maintenance of Elevate projects. She said the All-Inclusive Playground at Sokol Park is a good example of a project that has accounted for ongoing maintenance in the funding plan. Mayor Maddox reminded members that 10% of Elevate revenue generated is reserved for operations and maintenance.

Chris England (co-chair) informed members that the Park and Recreation subcommittee opted to engage a third party to take an impartial survey of the community to learn where Elevate funds should be invested to best suit the citizens.

The Parks and Recreation Subcommittee members will also meet before the end of the year to assess the inventory of current parks and community centers. Tyshawn Gardner (Advisory Council member), who serves as Vice President of Student Affairs at Stillman College, informed members that he would like to include the facilities at Stillman College in the inventory. He would like Dr. Warrick to have the opportunity to present the Stillman College master plan to the Advisory Council.

Mr. Rumsey thanked the City Council members who attended the meeting, Mr. Lee Busby (Council District 4) and Mr. Eddie Pugh (Council District 6). Michele Coley (Advisory Council member)

thanked Elevate staff for the improved meeting format that allows the subcommittee members to update the Advisory Council.

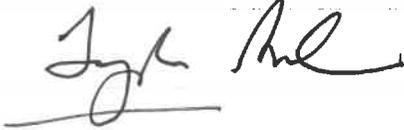
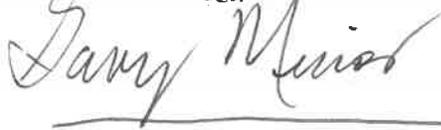
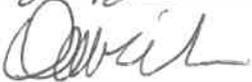
### **Recommendations for Approval**

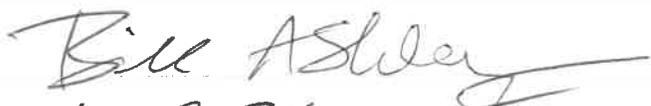
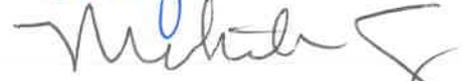
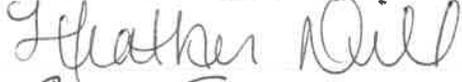
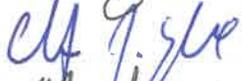
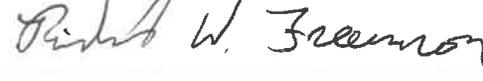
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Rep. England called for a vote on the following items, all of which were unanimously approved to advance to the City Council:

- Airport runway resurfacing construction
- Third party statistical survey for usage of parks and community centers
- Master planning of 315 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the proposed site of the new Experiential Learning Center

The next Advisory Council meeting will be held in February 2020.

First Name	Last Name	Signature
Tyshawn	GARDNER	
David	GAY, JR.	
Scott	HOLMES	
Shelley	JONES	
Russell	LAWRENCE	
Jarrold	MILLIGAN	
Gary	MINOR	
Wilson	MOORE	
Russell	MUMPER	
Jim	PAGE	
Tim	PARKER, III	
David	PASS	
Sarah	PATTERSON	
Gene	POOLE	
Tripp	POWELL	

First Name	Last Name	Signature
Tamika	ALEXANDER	
Bill	ASHLEY	
William	BLAKENEY	
Tom	BOBITT	
Karen	BROOKS	
Joseph	BROWN	
Lesley	BRUINTON	
Michele	COLEY	
Blake	CORDER	
Terrance	DEDRICK	
Heather	DILL	
Amy	ECHOLS	
Chris	ENGLAND	
Mark	FIELDS	
Rick	FREEMON	

Meeting 3  
October 24, 2019



First Name	Last Name	Signature
Nicole	PREWITT	
Steven	RUMSEY	
Tera	TUBBS	
Jimmy	WARREN	
Glenda	WEBB	
Sandra	WOLFE	
Linda	Parsons	