



## **MEETING SYNOPSIS | Advisory Council | December 8, 2021**

This is a summary of the tenth meeting of the Elevate Advisory Council. The attendance sheet follows. The agenda and meeting materials are at [elevatetuscaloosa.com](http://elevatetuscaloosa.com) under About > Meetings.

### **Elevate Updates & Survey**

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Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) welcomed the group and let them know that all Advisory Council members would receive an email the next day with a short survey from city staff requesting feedback about their participation on the Advisory Council. He recapped the discussion the council had at their June meeting, where they determined their priorities for discussion about projects for the remainder of the year. All projects have seen movement or progressed since June.

- Experience venues feasibility study – preliminary recommendations expected in January
- Civil Rights Trail and The Gateway – deep dive discussions occurred in October
- Tennis Center – deep dive discussion occurred in August and again today
- Bama Theatre – funding approved by the City Council to replace seats and carpeting
- Various parks and rec projects – further discussion to be scheduled following release of the parks community survey (which occurred in September)
- Transit study – project completed and the final report has been released
- University Boulevard Corridor – awarded RAISE grant in September by the USDOT
- Airport – deep dive discussion occurred in November
- Northern Riverwalk – ribbon cutting coming soon

### **Parks Survey – Tennis Results**

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Mr. Moore reminded the group that the results of the community parks and recreation survey were presented by the University of Alabama Institute for Social Science Research in September. Since then, city staff have performed data analytics on the survey results. This work identified 66 keywords describing activities people enjoy doing at parks and rec facilities. The top ten activity words can be found in the meeting materials. Many of the top ten have elements in common where a single type of facility could be provided for them (walking, running, biking, and hiking). After these, a few traditional sports categories also made the list. Tied for ninth place is tennis.

For respondents who mentioned having an interest in tennis, 73 percent indicated residency in the City of Tuscaloosa, followed by 12 percent who gave no response about residency and 11 percent who live in Northport. Taking the residency one layer deeper, 40 percent of those mentioning interest in tennis indicated residency North of the River in Tuscaloosa, followed by 12 percent giving no residency location, 11 percent in Northport, seven percent in East Central Tuscaloosa, seven percent in Southeast Tuscaloosa, and various percentages from other areas of the city.

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

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Mr. Moore began the discussion by reminding the Advisory Council of the 13 previous, open, public meetings where this project has been discussed. In addition, a small working group of city staff and



EAC members participated in three other meetings. The goal today is to address all points of discussion and resolve any outstanding questions in order to determine the EAC's recommended path forward. Mr. Moore noted that Mike Goldammer, Director of TTC, is in attendance to answer questions. Mayor Maddox gave a few remarks about the project. He welcomed the many guests in attendance in support of the tennis center expansion, and specifically noted Mrs. Emily Baker, a strong and generous advocate for the game of tennis and the Tuscaloosa Tennis Center. The original facility was built after the tornado, and it was built conservatively small. The community has stretched its capacity limits and pushed beyond them. Today, the center requires the city to provide about \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually to support its operations. This is the smallest activity center subsidy the city provides each year. The mayor acknowledged that the original cost estimates to complete the expansion have been increased, up to \$10 million. Two factors have driven this: 1) a larger financial investment can bring a larger economic return and 2) construction costs have dramatically risen since the onset of the pandemic.

Mr. Goldammer also made remarks. Before he accepted his position at TTC, his immediate previous experience included serving 14 years at the U.S. Tennis Association (USTA) as a section director. He has grown community membership at TTC over threefold in his tenure. During peak hours, the facility cannot serve the demand. He acknowledged the wide cross section from our community represented by the guests in attendance at the meeting, all of whom are avid supporters of tennis and TTC. They include directors of other tennis facilities in town, the state USTA leadership, business owners, teachers, coaches, and university staff and faculty. There is so much community outreach TTC could be doing in Tuscaloosa if the facility were larger. In addition, we could be attracting hundreds of visitors every weekend to play in tournaments at TTC. This expansion would allow the community to continue using the facility, even when a tournament is underway. Partnerships for tournaments with the University of Alabama would also be possible.

Mayor Maddox asked how the expansion would compare with Mobile's tennis facility. Mr. Goldammer responded that Mobile would still have more total courts. However, we would have seven devoted, high quality indoor courts, compared to Mobile's two makeshift indoor courts. We would also have clay courts (they have none), which many players prefer using. Tournaments that get rained out cause enormous frustration for players and visitors. Indoor courts ensure that play continues, and that is critical to success and repeat events.

Steven Rumsey (EAC member) asked what we could anticipate other tennis venues doing to remain competitive in response to our expansion. Specifically, could we expect that Mobile would construct more indoor courts? Mayor Maddox noted that we will always be in competition with others and Mobile is already having discussions about improving their facility. Mr. Rumsey also asked how tournament revenues are divided. Mr. Goldammer stated that most tennis-only facilities are not self-sustaining and require some financial support from outside sources. His goal for TTC is to reach a breakeven operational level within five to seven years of cutting the ribbon on the expansion. If any profit is generated, he would recommend that it be reinvested into the facility, whether for improvements, operations, or capital expenditures.



Jim Page (EAC member) asked for a summary of the cost difference between the original proposal and the current expansion plan. Mr. Goldammer responded that it is a factor of increasing the number of courts included in the expansion, in order to achieve the numbers needed to generate the most economic impact. He noted that the expansion plan and number of courts included is a very strategic, intentional decision. There is a specific number of each type of court needed to run tournaments well.

Shelley Jones (EAC member) asked what strategies we would use to attract events and tournaments. Mr. Goldammer responded that he would use two approaches. In the first, he would focus on local partnerships to cultivate more use of the facility. In the second, he would use all of his work experience and networks to aggressively pursue bids for the tournaments, in conjunction with the staff of Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports. He sets the standard for tournaments at TTC, and that standard is to provide exceptional customer service that goes above and beyond every time. Mr. Goldammer's work and personal experiences with tennis tournaments have given him a very clear understanding of what players and guests want, expect, and demand.

Mayor Maddox stated that he has been asked one question repeatedly: "What happens if Mike Goldammer leaves Tuscaloosa?" Mr. Goldammer responded that he has already demonstrated immense commitment to Tuscaloosa over the last four years. Although his family lives elsewhere in order to give his kids opportunities to advance in the sport of tennis at the college level and beyond, he has served here in his position devotedly, even at the size the facility is today. With an expansion, the facility would become even better, giving him fewer reasons to look for positions elsewhere. His second rebuttal to this question is that an expanded TTC will be the best in class, and it will not be possible to seek out and find a better facility to move to.

Tripp Powell (EAC member) expressed concern about the total cost of the proposed financial investment all at once. He would rather see a phased approach to the expansion. After the concept shows proof of life and success, expand further. A master plan could be developed to identify targets to hit before each additional phase commences. Mr. Goldammer responded that one reason to do the full expansion at once enables him to go after tournaments of all sizes. He could accommodate multiple events, possibly even simultaneously.

Representative England (EAC co-chair) implored Mr. Goldammer to teach others what he is doing so that his knowledge is shared. Rep. England also noted that a struggle with all public projects is to "future-proof" the facility. He believes a phased approach would limit our capacity to attract events and distinguish ourselves. His experience has taught him that most people hear "phased approach" and assume that future phases will never come to fruition. He believes this type of assumption by others could affect our ability to sell our asset (expanded TTC) to tournament rights holders. Phasing tends to erode confidence from others in buying into our vision.

Heather Dill (EAC member) asked how the economic impact numbers in the presentation were developed. She is familiar with the average spending per hotel guest, and the numbers seem too high to her. Mr. Moore responded that they were provided by Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports. She also asked if there is a strategic plan in place for selling and marketing the expanded facility. Mr.



Moore responded that this responsibility would fall to a joint effort between Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports and PARA. Ms. Dill responded that TTS's marketing budget would need to be increased to accommodate these efforts. She also asked how many tournaments are needed to break even operationally at the expanded facility. Mr. Goldammer responded that this is impossible to determine and analyze, due to the fact that individual tournaments vary greatly in their financial impact on or contribution to the facility operational budget. Mr. Rumsey asked Mr. Goldammer if he would have time to recruit events. Mr. Goldammer responded that he would need to bring on different staff to help free up capacity by shifting his duties to others, enabling him to spend more time soliciting and recruiting events. He does not believe a significant amount of money is needed to market TTC to event organizers. The network of industry players involved in choosing tournament locations is a relatively small, tight-knit group. Recruiting and courting them is not an expensive undertaking in Mr. Goldammer's professional opinion.

Meg Edwards with the USTA Alabama affiliate spoke up at this point. She runs the adult tournaments in Alabama. Tuscaloosa has never been able to win their tournaments in the past due to the lack of facilities. She said that Mobile's facility is currently the least popular place in Alabama for their tournament participants. The facility has declined into poor condition and the weather is often not conducive to outdoor tournaments. Their tournaments require a minimum of 30 courts, and they do not all have to be the same type of surface. They request bids from facilities every two years for their tournaments. She said the proposed expansion would likely become the number one place in Alabama to have events, due to the number of proposed indoor courts and the ability to collaborate with the University of Alabama. Currently, Auburn is the most preferred location.

Mayor Maddox acknowledged that he has repeatedly heard from members that they are concerned that if a funding increase is given to this project, that other Elevate projects will lose funding or pay the price. He countered that by noting that the Elevate financial projection and plan calls for us to keep spending below our total capacity to spend. This allows us to build reserves in the Elevate fund. Other projects will not lose funding or have anything taken away from them to offset the increase given to the tennis center.

Council President Kip Tyner made some remarks. He thanked Mrs. Baker again for her advocacy, along with the EAC members who volunteer their time to this effort. He does not support a phased approach, and he noted that all seven City Council members have confidence in this project and support it.

Mr. Moore noted that a simple majority of those in attendance can recommend moving forward with procuring professional design services using the \$500,000 available budget established on October 1 by the City Council. He called for a vote, and the motion was unanimously approved.

### **Next Steps**

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Final design and expected costs of the tennis center expansion will be brought back to the EAC for review when they are available. The next Advisory Council meeting has not yet been scheduled.

**Advisory Council Meeting Attendance  
December 8, 2021  
Daugherty Room - City Hall**

Name	In Attendance
Alexander, Tamika	NO
Blakeney, William	NO
Brooks, Karen (co-chair)	YES
Brown, Joseph	NO
Bruinton, Lesley	NO
Coley, Michele	YES
Corder, Blake	NO
Dedrick, Terrance	NO
Dill, Heather	YES
Echols, Amy	YES
England, Chris (co-chair)	YES
Gardner, Tyshawn	NO
Gay, Jr., David	NO
Jones, Shelley	YES
Lawrence, Russell	NO
Minor, Gary	NO
Moore, Wilson	NO
Mumper, Russell	NO
Newman, Brad	YES
Page, Jim	YES
Parker III, Tim	NO
Parsons, Linda	NO
Pass, David	NO
Patterson, Sarah	NO
Poole, Gene	YES
Powell, Tripp	YES
Prewitt, Nicole	YES
Rumsey, Steven	YES
Staley, Don	YES
Warren, Jimmy	NO
Wolfe, Sandra	YES

**Advisory Council Meeting Attendance - City Council  
December 8, 2021  
Daugherty Room - City Hall**

Name	In Attendance
Wilson, Matthew (City Council District 1)	NO
Howard, Raevan (City Council District 2)	NO
Crow, Norman (City Council District 3)	NO
Busby, Lee (City Council District 4)	NO
Tyner, Kip (City Council District 5)	YES
Faile, John (City Council District 6)	NO
Lanier, Cassius (City Council District 7)	NO