



## MEETING SYNOPSIS | Advisory Council

**November 1, 2021**

This is a summary of the ninth 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.

### **Welcome and Project Updates**

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Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) welcomed the group and began with an exciting announcement. The Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association recognized Elevate Tuscaloosa with its 2021 Outstanding Planning Award for a Project or Implementation Tool. In addition, Mayor Maddox received the Distinguished Leader award and Framework received the outstanding comprehensive plan award. Mr. Moore noted that Framework can be imagined as a “vehicle”, while Elevate Tuscaloosa is the fuel that allows the vehicle to move. Other announcements were shared:

- The groundbreaking ceremony for River District Park will be held on November 3 at 9 AM.
- The Northern Riverwalk project is nearing completion, with the ribbon cutting tentatively expected to be on December 16.
- Audrey Buck (City of Tuscaloosa) has been named Director of Saban Center between now and the project’s grand opening. She will oversee all aspects of project development.

### **Subcommittee Updates**

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The Connectivity Subcommittee meets November 19 at Tuscaloosa National Airport. All EAC members are welcome to attend. Dave Pass (subcommittee member) is overseeing this meeting.

Parks and Recreation has held two meetings recently. The Tuscaloosa Tennis Center and Benjamin Barnes YMCA projects were discussed by the subcommittee at their August 18 meeting. In addition, the group met on September 30 to receive a presentation from the University of Alabama Institute for Social Science Research that revealed the results of the parks and recreation community survey. The results and feedback received will be used for decision making. The survey report has been distributed to the EAC and is available on the Elevate website, as well.

Cultural Arts and Tourism met on August 19 and October 4. Johnson Consulting joined the group in August to present the data they have researched thus far as part of the Experience Venues feasibility study they are conducting. In addition, they traveled to Tuscaloosa over October 20 and 21 to meet with various stakeholder groups in our community which have an interest in the results of the study. If anyone else from the full EAC wants to meet with the consultants, they are welcome to reach out to staff. In October, the subcommittee heard from the Civil Rights History and Reconciliation Foundation with information about a Civil Rights Trail project that they would like to bring to Tuscaloosa, in conjunction with Elevate. The subcommittee also heard about some immediate needs at the Bama Theatre. This item is currently being vetted to identify all funding partners and determine a path to obtain full funding for it.



## Recommendations

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1. **Snow Hinton Park Phase 1:** the recommendation was to procure professional services to begin Phase 1 design and engineering for phase 1 of the master plan developed by Barge Design Solutions. A full copy of the master plan is on the Elevate website. This contract would be funded by the \$500,000 available budget adopted for FY 2021 by the City Council.

Mayor Maddox emphasized the great need for improvements at this park to make it safer and more user-friendly. He expects improvements to be completed in two phases. The City Council has approved both the budget needed to move forward with professional services and the projected timeline of funding \$5 million for construction in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023. Phase 1 was estimated to require up to 18 months for completion after work begins. Some key PARA board members were involved in reviewing the master plan before it was finalized. Tripp Powell (Parks and Recreation Subcommittee) stated that he appreciates preserving this park as open green space but making it the best that it can be. Steven Rumsey (Parks and Recreation Subcommittee) asked how many acres are in the park and the answer was provided (40 acres).

This recommendation was unanimously approved.

2. **Civil Rights History and Reconciliation Foundation:** in working with the Foundation, some exciting opportunities for the Civil Rights Trail in Tuscaloosa have been identified at two sites: the Old Tuscaloosa Jail and the Linton Barbershop. The City acquired the barbershop and its historic contents in early 2021. There are environmental remediation needs at the barbershop property. The recommendation is to use the \$500,000 available budget to procure professional services to develop a remediation plan and begin conceptual design and planning services for both properties. In the meantime, the Foundation will be inventorying and cataloging all of the historical contents of the barbershop on a volunteer basis.

Mr. Powell asked how difficult the remediation process is expected to be. Mr. Moore responded that we expect the Old Jail property to be a simpler and more straightforward process in regards to remediation. However, portions of the Linton Barbershop have black mold and a significant level of asbestos. The professional studies recommended would provide options for different approaches that can be taken to remediate and the relative cost of each. Mr. Moore added that we will look at best practices of adaptive reuse of historical facilities like these.

This recommendation was unanimously approved.

3. **The Gateway:** this project was identified by Project Unity's Education and Youth Sports subcommittees. Mr. Howell shared that these subcommittees recommended updating and improving the facility's programming and physical spaces (internal and external), with a goal of improving youth access to technology, digital arts, and creative resources. The recommendation to the EAC is to move forward with using the \$250,000 budget to procure professional services to design the improvements and updates. The City expects to follow federal procurement procedures on this project in order to remain eligible for grants.

This recommendation was unanimously approved.



4. **Tuscaloosa Tennis Center:** the recommendation was to procure professional services to design the expansion using the \$500,000 of available funding. This project has emerged from the process of being reviewed by a working group in 2020 that included EAC members Tripp Powell and Don Staley, in addition to City staff and Tennis Center staff. As part of the feasibility study that is ongoing, Johnson Consulting's research shows that interest and participation in tennis for sports tourism has not been harmed by the pandemic. Mr. Powell stated that some investment at this facility makes sense in a few ways, including for economic impact and community use and enjoyment. He stated that the group should be measured in their recommendation, to ensure the extent of the investment can be managed. Mr. Moore noted that some public-private partnerships might be available for this project to offset costs.

Jimmy Warren (Cultural Arts and Tourism Subcommittee) noted that he would like to see a pro forma with the expected cost of the expansion and the projected operating revenues and expenses after expansion.

Heather Dill (Cultural Arts and Tourism Subcommittee) asked if an analysis had been done to show how many events will need to be held at the expanded facility in order for it to be profitable or make financial sense. Mr. Moore responded that the small working group developed a projected breakdown of different types of events it could draw and the number of courts needed to host each type of tournament. Don Staley (Cultural Arts and Tourism Subcommittee) added that around 44 events were projected for the facility and Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports continues to support this project. Mr. Powell noted that the working group identified a threshold for the number of courts needed to recruit USTA tournaments and events. Mr. Rumsey asked if partnerships would be possible with the University of Alabama to attract larger tournaments. Mayor Maddox responded that this is possible and discussions have already taken place with the head tennis coach in this regard. USTA-sanctioned events draw international students who want to play tennis, so there is a significant upside for the University of Alabama in an expansion.

Mayor Maddox added that last year, the Tennis Center generated an operating loss of around \$186,000. He expects it to be about \$150,000 this year. Currently, the City of Tuscaloosa provides PARA with the funding to offset this shortfall. The City is not approaching the expansion project in order to make the facility profitable. The pro forma for the expansion indicates that, between memberships and tournaments, a breakeven may be achieved. As long as we can maintain or improve the bottom line, while also driving economic activity through tournaments and events, Mayor Maddox will view the project as a success.

Ms. Dill expressed concern with moving forward with the Tennis Center expansion. She has not seen tennis events drive revenue and room nights for the cities that she has worked for as a hotelier, or at least not to the same extent that other tourism events can do. It seems to her that other sports drive more attendance. She does not want to recommend advancing the project further until there is a dedicated plan in place to attract events and even have some secured commitments for events in place. Katy Beth Jackson (City of Tuscaloosa) noted that Mr. Goldammer has noted previously that having indoor courts is a unique feature that will distinguish Tuscaloosa as a tennis destination for tournaments. Mayor Maddox added that the



economic impact is not the only reason to expand the facility; the community use of it is a significant consideration, as well. The goal is to have tennis centralized at this facility and have it be very high quality, rather than having a few courts sprinkled throughout the city. He also believes the impact on the Alberta area is important as it continues to redevelop after the 2011 tornado.

Michele Coley (Connectivity Subcommittee) stated that she is uncertain why the project's expected cost has been increased to \$10 million, and there are other worthy projects, like the Bama Theatre, that could also benefit from receiving more financial support like this project is getting. Mr. Powell added that he would like to understand the increase in the project's funding, too. Mayor Maddox responded that construction costs have increased significantly since the working group last reviewed the financials for the expansion, and that is driving the majority of the funding increase.

In response to the comment about the Bama Theatre, he noted that the theatre has a couple of challenges. One is a long-term lease agreement needs to be in place between PARA (its owner) and The Arts Council (its manager-operator) before the city will be comfortable investing significantly into the facility, since control of the building is uncertain without a lease. Sandy Wolfe noted that discussions are currently underway on the lease. The other challenge is that a master plan is needed for the entire facility instead of making piecemeal investments. Ms. Wolfe reiterated that she is currently seeking joint funding from at least the county and city to address the immediate needs of replacing the seats and carpet.

Mr. Rumsey also voiced a couple of concerns about the tennis center expansion. One is succession planning if the Tennis Center loses Mr. Goldammer as its director. The other is that other facilities in the state or region will have the ability to match any improvements we make, rendering our facility no more desirable as a tournament facility than others. Mr. Rumsey asked that Mr. Goldammer explain how we will actually be competitive in recruiting tournaments. He also asked how much the city paid for the existing facility (\$3 million).

Mayor Maddox addressed a couple of comments by saying that one project being funded should not be viewed as excluding funding for another project. In addition, Tuscaloosa needs to look at our existing community assets to determine the areas in which we want to be elite. The tennis facility is already a well-managed asset in our community, and he sees an expansion as a way to improve it and give us a real chance to be competitive for events.

## **Next Steps**

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Professional services will proceed for Snow Hinton Park Phase 1, the Civil Rights project, and The Gateway.

An Advisory Council meeting will be scheduled with Mike Goldammer to discuss the Tuscaloosa Tennis Center expansion further. This meeting was scheduled for December 8 at 1:30 PM at City Hall. City staff will send members all historic documents pertaining to the project before the meeting.

**Advisory Council Meeting Attendance**  
**November 1, 2021**  
**Virtual - Zoom**

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	YES
Dill, Heather	YES
Echols, Amy	YES
England, Chris (co-chair)	NO
Freemon, Rick	YES
Gardner, Tyshawn	NO
Gay, Jr., David	NO
Jones, Shelley	NO
Lawrence, Russell	NO
Minor, Gary	YES
Moore, Wilson	NO
Mumper, Russell	YES
Newman, Brad	YES
Page, Jim	NO
Parker, III, Tim	NO
Parsons, Linda	YES
Pass, David	NO
Patterson, Sarah	YES
Poole, Gene	YES
Powell, Tripp	YES
Prewitt, Nicole	YES
Rumsey, Steven	YES
Staley, Don	YES
Warren, Jimmy	YES
Wolfe, Sandra	YES