



## MEETING SYNOPSIS | Advisory Council

**February 1, 2021**

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

### Welcome

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Mayor Walt Maddox (City of Tuscaloosa) welcomed the group and thanked them for their time and for giving back to the community. He began by giving a brief status update on the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Maddox touched on the numbers of hospitalizations and other key trends, which have been declining. Ongoing city efforts aim to improve vaccination availability by working with other local government agencies and the Alabama Department of Public Health.

### Program and Project Updates

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Mayor Maddox provided an overview of several Elevate projects and programs. Look for the slide deck on the Elevate Tuscaloosa website under About > Meetings.

- The Elevate Tuscaloosa portal launched a few months ago and shows project statuses and how funding is being spent. The City of Tuscaloosa already has open data available on the city's website but this portal is an additional transparency tool just for Elevate projects and programs.
- Restart Tuscaloosa has been a key element of keeping Tuscaloosa small businesses operational during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - The Chamber of Commerce's small business relief fund raised over \$400,000 in private donations; the city contributed \$1 million to it through the Restart Tuscaloosa funding.
  - In addition, the City of Tuscaloosa contributed to and managed the Lounge Assistance Program, which made \$400,000 of assistance available to lounge establishments.
  - This assistance to small businesses helped them and their owners pay their employees, pay bills, and remain operational.
  - Neighborhood investments in the form of local street repaving projects are well under way and will continue through 2022.
  - Investments into public safety equipment and technology will also continue through 2022.
  - Without Restart Tuscaloosa, the city could have maintained essential functions during the pandemic but could not have provided assistance to small businesses and citizens.
- Education – the Dual Enrollment Scholarship program has provided hundreds of high school students in the Tuscaloosa City Schools (TCS) with college funding in its first year of inception. This program covers tuition, fees, and books for up to six college credit hours.
- Education – the expanded Pre-K funding through Elevate ensured that each student who applied for the program this year was accepted. We need to continue to spread the word about this program and encourage even more families to enroll their children.



- Education – Summer Learning programs continued in 2020 and will return in 2021. Mayor Maddox would like Dr. Mike Daria (TCS Superintendent) to speak with the Advisory Council to discuss their summer programs. Enrollment in 2020 doubled for elementary school students. TCS focuses on children in kindergarten through third grade to slow or stop summer learning loss and teach all children to be literate by third grade. The programs also allow the school system’s most talented teachers to work with the students.
- All-Inclusive Playground at Sokol Park: this PARA-managed construction project is well underway and is a great community partnership with Nick’s Kids, the city, PARA Foundation and many other donors. Mayor Maddox hopes to see future phases expand the playground further.
- McDonald Hughes Community Center renovations are ongoing. Mayor Maddox hopes that all Advisory Council members will have a chance to see the facility when it is safe to do so. He reminded the group that there will be later phases of work at this facility and the Parks and Recreation Subcommittee can expect to review these in the future. The current renovation is under budget and we hope to do a bit more work with the funding that remains from the phase one budget. He also noted that the work being done now will boost the rental fee income for the facility, which is already one of the largest revenue sources there.
- Parks and Recreation community survey launched in January and the deadline will be extended by one more month, closing in early March. Most of our responses have come through the online survey. Anyone who wants to complete it on paper can call 311 to request a copy.
- Snow Hinton Park master plan is closing out; the next step for the future will be to implement ideas from the master plan in a phased approach.
- River District Park is in the design process. The city has not yet solicited bids for the construction work but the estimated total project cost is \$5 million. This new park will be a wonderful connection between the existing Riverwalk and the extension of it west of the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater. The opportunities for this location abound, especially with all of the commercial development occurring near it.
- The reconstruction of the Tuscaloosa National Airport’s primary runway will begin in a couple of months and is fully funded through FAA grants. Mayor Maddox reminded the group that in 2020, the city collected about \$20 million in Elevate Tuscaloosa revenues and was awarded over \$26 million in grants for projects.
- Northern Riverwalk construction begins this month. The land donated by the Randall family made this project possible.
- Western Riverwalk has been awarded the BUILD grant, which was made possible by several advocates in our legislative delegation at the national and local levels. Amenities for this project will be expanded due to the grant. Ongoing efforts revolve around acquiring property and complying with the grant requirements.
- Transit study: the city launched a community survey today, which will be open for a month. The study should be complete by this summer. Mayor Maddox noted that transit operations are one of our most heavily federally-funded services.
- Saban Center master planning has been ongoing for several months. In the spring, we hope to hold a celebration for the renaming of 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue to Nick’s Kids Avenue. The pedestrian bridge that will be provided by the BUILD grant will be a critical asset for this new venue.



## Group Discussion

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Mayor Maddox turned the discussion over to the group for questions.

Co-chair Karen Brooks asked which company was awarded the construction contract for the Northern Riverwalk. John Plott Company was the low bidder and was awarded the contract in January.

Steven Rumsey asked about the impact of the pandemic on our local economy and the city's current standing with credit rating agencies. The mayor noted that the city has budgeted for a \$10 million general fund reduction for the fiscal year ending on September 30, 2021. This very conservative budget was achieved by reducing costs across the city. Currently, the city is on target to meet the budget. The mayor also stated that moving forward with the Elevate plan during the pandemic made a lot of sense in order to take advantage of lower construction costs and lower interest rates on our debt. Our bond credit ratings are unchanged and Elevate Tuscaloosa is a dedicated funding source that is available to make interest and principal payments on Elevate-related debt. The Elevate Tuscaloosa plan was designed to be a financial plan that leverages debt to deliver projects successfully within shorter timeframes. The plan is designed to be self-sustainable from the perspectives of debt management and operations and maintenance.

A member asked about the timeline for Saban Center and the pedestrian bridge that will connect it with River District Park. If all tasks go perfectly, the center will open in late 2023 or early 2024. Several factors are at play that could impact this timeline, however. One is the city's lease with the current building tenant. Another is the BUILD grant, compliance with which will require more time than if the project were financed solely with local funding. In addition, there will be a capital fundraising campaign, which has not been launched due to the pandemic. For the bridge work specifically, we will try to complete the work while the improvements are being made to Jack Warner Parkway (under a separate road improvement project).

Dave Pass reminded the group that the city also was awarded a small community air service development grant to use for attracting commercial air service to our airport. We still have about four years to expend these funds.

For projects tabled indefinitely during the pandemic, one member asked about the outlook for bringing them back into an active status. The mayor would like to see the Advisory Council convene as a group when it is safe to do so. He noted that consumer behaviors, desires, and needs have been affected by the pandemic. All Elevate Tuscaloosa projects and programs should be reviewed and analyzed to determine which are still valid and worthy of completing in light of conditions that have changed since Elevate was adopted. A member asked if the Harris-Nicol Water Recreation and Trails project would return to an active status soon. Mayor Maddox responded that he would not expect a permanent removal of the project from the Elevate plan, due to its contributions to both quality of life and new business/corporate recruitment. Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) noted that the master planning contract has been temporarily paused due to the consultants' inability to engage fully with industry experts during the pandemic.

Jim Page asked about the funding that Elevate provided to the city's general fund for operations in the 2020-2021 budget. He wanted to know how this would be disclosed on the portal. Katy Beth Jackson (City of Tuscaloosa) responded that the budgeted amounts are listed on the website at



[elevatetuscaloosa.com/budget](http://elevatetuscaloosa.com/budget). The plan is to have the general fund reimburse Elevate for these amounts over the next three years. Once the reimbursements are budgeted, they will be disclosed on the portal. Mayor Maddox also noted that the Advisory Council can follow the City Council's budget adoption process later this year in August and September.

Shelley Jones reiterated the value of the three educational programs funded by Elevate Tuscaloosa. As a retired educator, Ms. Jones recognizes the importance of these programs. She feels that they may often be overlooked because they are intangible programs rather than a tangible construction project that can be seen in the community by all.

### **Next Steps**

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Brendan Moore reminded the Advisory Council of the parks and recreation community survey and asked everyone to reach out to 311 if paper copies are needed.

Mayor Maddox asked members to continue to be advocates for Elevate. He also asked each person to bring any industry trends or changes they see coming in their own professions and fields of study. We need these individual perspectives in order to adapt Elevate Tuscaloosa to meet changing demands and needs.

The Advisory Council's next meeting has not yet been scheduled.

**Advisory Council Meeting Attendance**

**February 1, 2021**

**Zoom**

<u>Name</u>	<u>In Attendance</u>
Alexander, Tamika	X
Blakeney, William	X
Brooks, Karen	X
Brown, Joseph	X
Bruinton, Lesley	X
Coley, Michele	
Corder, Blake	
Dedrick, Terrance	X
Dill, Heather	X
Echols, Amy	X
England, Chris	
Freemon, Rick	X
Gardner, Tyshawn	
Gay, Jr., David	
Helms, Bryan	X
Jones, Shelley	X
Lawrence, Russell	X
Minor, Gary	X
Moore, Wilson	
Mumper, Russell	X
Page, Jim	X
Parker, III, Tim	
Parsons, Linda	X
Pass, David	X
Patterson, Sarah	
Poole, Gene	X
Powell, Tripp	X
Prewitt, Nicole	X
Rumsey, Steven	X
Staley, Don	X
Warren, Jimmy	
Wolfe, Sandra	X
Bobitt, Tom	X
Holmes, Scott	X
Jackson, Katy Beth	X
Maddox, Walt	X
Milligan, Jarrod	X
Moore, Brendan	X
Snowden, Susan	X
Standridge, Carly	X
Tubbs, Tera	X
Webb, Glenda	X