



## MEETING SYNOPSIS | Advisory Council

**March 2, 2020**

This is a summary of the fifth meeting of the Elevate Advisory Council. The attendance sheet follows. The agenda and other meeting materials can be found on the Elevate Tuscaloosa website under Advisory Council > Meetings. The group discussed the following topics.

### **Welcome**

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Mayor Walt Maddox (City of Tuscaloosa) welcomed the group to the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater and reminded them that before the facility opened, there were naysayers who made various remarks about why the Amphitheater would not be successful. Today, we know it has been a success. Mayor Maddox compared that time to some of the remarks he hears about Elevate Tuscaloosa; he is confident that the community will view the projects and initiatives as successes in hindsight, just as the Amphitheater is today. Next, he asked Lesley Bruinton (subcommittee member) to share exciting news about the Dual Enrollment Scholarship program. Tuscaloosa City Schools (TCS) opened the application period about a week ago and it will remain open until May 1. Currently, 36.3% of the eligible 488 juniors have applied; TCS expects more to do so. The scholarships provide students with up to six hours of college credit at any of the local educational institutions, with tuition, fees, and books paid by Elevate.

### **Subcommittee Updates: Connectivity**

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Michele Coley (subcommittee member) updated the Advisory Council on the Downtown-University Corridor project. This project is the final section of the University Corridor Study (conducted by the city and the University of Alabama) that resulted in phased improvements to University Boulevard. The remaining section begins at 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue and extends east to Wallace Wade Avenue and will be completed in two phases. The improvements include: 11-foot travel lanes containing two travel lanes, two bike lanes, curb and gutter, green space with landscaping, sidewalks, lighting, and underground utilities. The width in this area is narrow and constrained by development on both sides of the road. This project will increase pedestrian access and movement in the corridor.

Ms. Coley shared that over 6,300 people participated in the commercial air service survey, which well exceeded the goal of 5,000. The next Connectivity meeting is on March 25 at the Tuscaloosa National Airport. Attendees will hear the results of the survey and leakage study. The city recently received news of the approval of a \$750,000 grant. David Pass (subcommittee member) noted that the grant funds will either mitigate risk for or provide an incentive to attract a commercial airline. Mayor Maddox recognized that the airport progress would not be possible without advocates like David Pass, the University of Alabama out-of-state student population, Senator Richard Shelby's support, business support, current market trends, and the timing of multiple factors converging.

Ms. Coley informed members that the land survey for the Western Riverwalk is currently underway. The city is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to obtain a lease for the Corps-owned park area, and expects to complete the agreement in March.



Jimmy Duncan (McGiffert and Associates) provided an overview of Phase 1 of the Northern Riverwalk Randall Park and Trailhead project. He referred to schematic maps (copy available in the meeting materials) and pointed out the nearby McFarland Boulevard Bridge, Church of the Highlands, and Northbank Plaza in order to orient members to the location. Starting at the western end, he gave an overview of the one half-mile project. The trailhead will be located behind the Residence Inn. The Rice Mine Road Loop will require widening in order to create a turn lane for entry into the park. Mr. Duncan pointed out the asphalt parking lot with approximately 75 spaces, a pavilion (to be designed by Ellis Architects) with restroom and vending, a playground, and a grand lawn area. There are multiple hardwood trees east of the open lawn that will flank the trailhead.

Behind the Church of the Highlands, a large wooded area will be thinned. There are water and sewer main lines in the area, with a maintenance road that runs the length of the Riverwalk corridor. Access to these will be maintained, with the Riverwalk serving as a vehicular and pedestrian path. Further east near Northbank Plaza, the Riverwalk trail and maintenance road converge to a major channel that drains into the river. At this point, a 300-400-foot elevated bridge will be necessary. Mr. Duncan informed members that the bridge may be the end of Phase 1. Future phases may include a second elevated bridge on the east boundary of Northbank Plaza.

The gray area in the schematic design is potential development, but it requires an additional land donation from the Randall family. Mr. Duncan mentioned various ideas for this 6–7 acre area: a dog park, disc golf, or the option to clean up the area and leave it wooded. If the land becomes available, he will engage the Connectivity subcommittee for ideas.

Ms. Coley noted the opportunity for public art to be incorporated into the trail. The red squares on the schematic maps indicate areas where concrete slabs could house future art installations.

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

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Jimmy Warren (subcommittee member) explained that the Cultural Arts and Tourism subcommittee asked Sandy Wolfe (Executive Director of The Arts Council) and Don Staley (President/CEO of Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission) to develop long-range plans for their organizations and present them to the subcommittee. The Arts Council's (TAC) presentation included:

- Expansion of public art and incorporating it in all Elevate projects, where appropriate
- Solve problems through art: for example lighting a dark public street with artistic lighting
- Establish a concert series at the Bama Theatre during the off-season of the Amphitheater
- Create an “arts block” along Greensboro Avenue between the Bama Theatre and the Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center
- Pursue long term lease or a purchase property along the “arts block” including the second and third floors of the Dinah Washington Cultural Arts Center
- Establish a program similar to the Chamber's Leadership Tuscaloosa – but participants learn about art in the community
- Explore partnership opportunities with local businesses and other non-profit
- Obtain funding to improve staffing for TAC



Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports' (TTS) presentation included:

- Create a destination marketing organization to promote Tuscaloosa for events
- Construct space for conferences, meetings, conventions, and sporting events
- Promote shows at the Bama Theatre in off-season of the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater
- Utilize the riverfront and install amenities for hosting events, like bass fishing tournaments
- Focus on building niche sports complexes that would not compete with other cities
- Consider locating an urban soccer park in West Tuscaloosa
- Capitalize on \$9 billion national industry comprised by youth travel sports programs
- Pursue an experience venue and/or multi-sport complex that is flexible and adaptable

Mr. Warren gave an update of the Bama Theatre. Mike Ellis (Ellis Architects) and sub-consultants, Newcomb and Boyd, spent three days investigating the existing building, technical equipment, and furnishings. Mr. Ellis and his team are compiling a list of opportunities, needs, and associated costs and will present their findings to the subcommittee.

The city has finalized a contract with Johnson Consulting. The consulting firm will analyze our market and interview key stakeholders to determine the feasibility of either a convention center, an athletic facility, or both. This phase will begin in April. If the firm concludes our market could support a venue, the second phase will recommend how to manage, fund, use, and operate the facility.

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

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Tripp Powell (subcommittee member) reminded the Advisory Council that Barge Design Solutions has been hired to conduct a master plan of Snow Hinton Park. Mr. Powell also serves on the Financial Analysis subcommittee that recommended an additional task order for Barge to conduct an infrastructure analysis of the area surrounding the park (discussed in more detail later in the meeting).

Ms. Adrian Cleckler-Collins (PARA) updated the subcommittee on the All-Inclusive Playground project. The PARA Foundation has raised over \$1 million for Phase 1 of the project and is currently fundraising for Phase 2. The groundbreaking will take place on March 24 and Mr. Powell encouraged all members to attend.

Jason Walker with TTL spoke to the subcommittee about River District Park, the unofficial name. TTL will soon begin developing a conceptual plan of the park, which is located between the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater and Hotel Indigo. Mr. Powell noted the opportunity to incorporate artistic lighting at this park. He noted that the site poses multiple challenges but also exciting opportunities.

The Harris-Nicol Water Recreation and Trails project is an untapped resource for our community. TTL is analyzing the surrounding area and is actively seeking ideas from the community on what they want to see at the lakes. Some ideas that have been mentioned include: zip-lining, rock climbing, rope swings, paddle boats, and paddle boards.

Mr. Powell recognized Mike Goldammer (Tuscaloosa Tennis Center) and his advocacy for the game of tennis. Mr. Goldammer spoke to the subcommittee about a proposed facility expansion. He also brought a representative from the U.S. Tennis Association, who told the group the expansion can and will work. Mr. Powell noted that the subcommittee is taking a methodical approach to ensure



that any expansion will be economically feasible. A smaller working group is going to evaluate the economic impact and long-term costs of the proposed expansion and bring an update back. A member noted that the group should consider where, within the broad market of tennis facilities and tournaments, the Tuscaloosa center should compete.

### **Subcommittee Updates: Financial Analysis**

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David Pass (subcommittee member) updated the Advisory Council on the subcommittee's unanimous approval of the recommended changes to the 10-Year projection timeline, some of which are formatting changes. The full Advisory Council later reviewed each of the changes.

Mr. Pass noted that the subcommittee recommended the task order for Barge Design Solutions to conduct an infrastructure analysis of Snow Hinton Park and the surrounding area. This work will require about 95 days and will look at traffic flows and ways to improve travel in and around the park and surrounding retail centers.

There was an update on the online accountability portal project. The City of Tuscaloosa has a professional services contract with Slipstich, LLC a company which is developing a financial online portal that will be available to the public via the Elevate Tuscaloosa website. He noted that this will be a fantastic resource for citizens and Advisory Council members to keep track of Elevate funds, where funds are spent, project information, and timelines.

### **Group Discussion**

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Linda Parsons (Advisory Council member) inquired if the \$750,000 airport grant was reflected on the current 10-year projection spreadsheet. Mayor Maddox responded that it is not included currently. Upon confirmation of the runway grant match, the spreadsheet will be updated.

Ms. Parsons inquired about the \$5 million designated in the projection for "Environmental Service Fee Reduction". Specifically, she asked why it increases over the 10-year period. Susan Snowden (City of Tuscaloosa Chief Financial Officer) reminded members that beginning in October 2019, residential garbage customers received a monthly reduction in their garbage fees. This was intended to help offset the higher sales tax rate for households. This funding will be transferred to the city's General Fund each year to replace the lost garbage fee revenue. The projected amount increases by a 2% growth rate each year, as the reduction in the garbage fee is also expected to change over time.

Ms. Coley inquired about the line item "Tuscaloosa National Airport – terminal" and why the amounts on the projection are empty but the row is shaded in blue. Mayor Maddox explained there are currently no projected cash outlays for design of the terminal. However, the blue indicates that the city plans to borrow through bonds. As shown on the Project Financing table, \$12.8 million is projected in bonds in FY 2022 for design, construction and other costs.

Mayor Maddox discussed the current advantage of low interest rates but the disadvantage of high construction costs. Another challenge is funding the long-term maintenance of facilities. The goal is that most Elevate projects should not take away from the city's normal operations.



## Recommendations for Approval

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Jarrod Milligan (City of Tuscaloosa) called for a vote on the conditional approval for the Northern Riverwalk conceptual plan presented by Jimmy Duncan. The group unanimously approved it to advance to the design stage.

Mr. Milligan called for a vote on the Snow Hinton Park infrastructure analysis to be conducted by Barge Design Solutions. The group unanimously approved it to advance to the City Council.

Mayor Maddox reviewed the 10-year financial projection. He stressed the importance of maintaining the spreadsheet, as it will become more difficult over time to find revenues to fund future projects not yet conceived. See the meeting materials for a detailed list of the changes. The following additional comments were made as he reviewed the list of changes:

1. The initials in the bottom right corner indicate the most recent date of city staff approval.
2. Colors are used throughout the document to help identify years of debt issuances.
3. Downtown-University Corridor - added \$750,000 in cash in FY 2020 (reduced future bond amount by same) to begin professional services for the project.
4. The city will pay with cash as often as possible (as opposed to issuing debt in the form of bonds). The undesignated balance is projected cash flow not yet designated for a project.
5. Bowers Park – bond date moved back due to no current plans for the park.
6. Experience Venue(s) – added \$110,000 in cash in FY 2020 (reduced future bond amount by same) to cover the consulting contract with Johnson Consulting.
7. McAbee – added \$500,000 in cash in FY 2020 (reduced future bond amount by same) to pay for potential professional design services for improving the facility.
8. Professional services – consolidated the amounts all into FY 2020 and increased the total amount from \$750,000 to \$1 million to match the actual budget adopted by City Council. This line item is used to project needs for “starter funds” for projects, but the costs are eventually to be accounted for within the appropriate project line item.
9. Project Trinity – the bond issuance date was moved back because the State of Alabama (which is in charge of the project) may not move to Phase 2 of this project. Even if it does, the State may not require any funding from the city due to the passage of the Rebuild Alabama Act, which occurred after adoption of Elevate Tuscaloosa (the initial Elevate projection provided \$7.5 million for this project). Once there is more certainty, the funds could be redirected into a different project in the district.
10. Projected interest rates on future bond issuances are conservatively high due to uncertainty.
11. Saban Center – engineering and design – changed FY 2020 cash amount to \$550,000 to cover the project coordination contract for the planning phase. The city is paying the cost of these services on behalf of the non-profit organizations moving into the facility.
12. The Tuscaloosa Tennis Center project was originally designated to receive \$3.5 million. Once the working group presents its conclusions about the potential expansion to the Parks and Recreation subcommittee, this amount could be adjusted.
13. The debt issuance date for the Western Riverwalk project moved back due to the ongoing property negotiations with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The mayor’s goal is to get the



project underway in 2021. The \$730,000 in FY 2020 is for professional services. There will also be approximately \$150,000 for right-of-way acquisition.

Co-chair Chris England called for a vote to approve the 10-Year financial projection and timeline. The group unanimously approved it to advance to the City Council.

## **General Updates**

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Mayor Maddox reminded the Advisory Council to continue to be ambassadors for Elevate and to encourage members of the community to attend upcoming events. City staff are available to speak to any groups in the community about Elevate Tuscaloosa. Partnerships will be critical – pairing Elevate with ideas from other agencies or the private sector will maximize the impact. He referred to a handout that lists the upcoming events (see meeting materials):

- March 12: Snow Hinton Park Community Workshop
- March 24: All-Inclusive Playground Groundbreaking at Sokol Park
- March 25: Connectivity meeting at the airport (survey results) – all are welcome
- April 1-2: Feasibility study stakeholder engagement meetings (conference center + athletic & events center)
- April 2: Cultural Arts and Tourism subcommittee meeting will be devoted to the feasibility study – all are welcome
- April 6: McDonald Hughes Renovation Preview
- August 27: Mayor’s Town Hall – Elevate Update

Mayor Maddox also discussed the opportunity for the Advisory Council’s next meeting to occur at the Finley Center in Hoover. This state-of-the-art \$125 million facility could provide city staff and Advisory Council members with ideas for programming, financing, operating, etc. One concept that the Mayor highlighted is that when the facility is not in use for tournaments or leagues, it is free for Hoover residents to use. The tour dates under consideration are April 30 and May 7.

Co-chair Karen Brooks spoke of how many exciting things are happening in Tuscaloosa in the short time since adoption of Elevate less than a year ago. The timing really seems to be aligning many interests simultaneously and creating momentum to accomplish a significant amount.

## **Next Steps**

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The Northern Riverwalk concept plan advances to design, with the condition that McGiffert and Associates later return to the Connectivity subcommittee to discuss specific design elements for the project.

The Snow Hinton Park infrastructure analysis and Elevate 10-year financial projection and timeline advance to the City Council.

The Advisory Council will next meet at the Finley Center in Hoover on April 30 or May 7.



**Advisory Council**

March 2, 2020 – 11:30 am

Tuscaloosa Amphitheater Dining Hall

First Name	Last Name	Sub Committee	In Attendance
Karen	Brooks	Co-Chair	X
Chris	England	Co-Chair	X
Bill	Ashley	Connectivity	
Nicole	Prewitt	Connectivity	X
Tamika	Alexander	Connectivity	X
Wilson	Moore	Connectivity	
Russ	Mumper	Connectivity	
William	Blakeney	Connectivity	
Linda	Parsons	Connectivity	X
Dave	Pass	Connectivity	X
Michele	Coley	Connectivity	X
Russell	Lawrence	Connectivity	X
Tyshawn	Gardner	Cultural Arts and Tourism	
Gene	Poole	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Heather	Dill	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Jim	Page	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Sarah	Patterson	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Sandy	Wolfe	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Jimmy	Warren	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Joseph/Rob	Brown/Steward	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Rick	Freemon	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Don	Staley	Cultural Arts and Tourism	X
Steven	Rumsey	Parks and Recreation	
Shelley	Jones	Parks and Recreation	X
Amy	Echols	Parks and Recreation	X
Terrance	Dedrick	Parks and Recreation	X
David	Gay, Jr.	Parks and Recreation	X
Blake	Corder	Parks and Recreation	
Gary	Minor	Parks and Recreation	X
Tim	Parker, III	Parks and Recreation	X
Tripp	Powell	Parks and Recreation	X
Lesley	Bruinton	Parks and Recreation	X