



MEETING SYNOPSIS | Advisory Council

November 16, 2022

This is a summary of the twelfth meeting of the Elevate Advisory Council. The attendance sheet follows. The agenda and meeting materials are at elevatetuscaloosa.com under About > Meetings.

Welcome

Mayor Maddox (City of Tuscaloosa) welcomed the group and shared that bids for the McWright's Ferry Road expansion came in. He shared that once bids are reviewed and the City Council votes on December 6th, the project should be underway sometime in February. He said that this is another exciting achievement for our community that will continue to galvanize growth.

For this meeting, Mayor Maddox explained he had two goals in mind. One is to update the committee on past, present and future projects. The second goal is to discuss next steps for the Advisory Council.

Program and Project Updates

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

- **Grants and Partnerships** - Elevate has leveraged over \$50 million dollars in grants and partnerships since inception. Having leveraged a substantial amount of federal opportunities, Elevate Tuscaloosa is looking to do more in the future.
- **Bama Theatre** - Elevate assisted in updating the Bama Theatre back to high standards with interior improvements that meet community needs. Mayor Maddox expressed his gratitude to Tuscaloosa County and the City Council for their partnership.
- **Pre-K** - Thanks to Elevate Tuscaloosa, 620 children from Tuscaloosa City Schools (TCS) had the opportunity to attend Pre-K. TCS is the only school system, out of 138 in Alabama, that has universal Pre-K. Test scores continue to validate that a four year old child who is academically at risk, and given the opportunity to attend a fully functioning Pre-K program will be reading on grade level by first grade.
- **Summer Learning Program** - 2,350 Pre-K through eighth grade students participated this past summer in the Summer Learning program. 75.8% of K-3rd grade students exhibited no summer learning loss, as a result of participating.
- **Dual Enrollment Scholarships** - In 2021, 391 students from TCS who were juniors and seniors participated in Dual Enrollment. Last year, Dual Enrollment consisted of 6 hours of credit given by Shelton State Community College, Stillman College, and the University of Alabama. Tuition, books and fees were completely covered by Elevate. In 2022, because of Elevate funding, that was increased to 9 credit hours and begins in the 10th grade. Even more exciting, Mayor Maddox stated that after this past summer, Shelton State Community College announced that if a student takes 9 hours at Shelton through the Elevate Dual Enrollment program, they will match another 9 hours after the student graduates from high



school. Even if a student plans to attend Stillman or UA, students can take coursework at Shelton for their specific degree in order to get this new benefit. Shelton State has shared that without Elevate Tuscaloosa so many of our students and young people would not have had the opportunity to attend college or become career ready. It is proven that over 80% of those enrolled in the Dual Enrollment Program go on to either a two or four year education.

- **Athletics Excellence Fund** – TCS conducted a study in 2021 showing that other school systems in the southeast of similar size offer competitive salaries to recruit and retain coaches with most spending over \$500,000 per year. With Elevate Tuscaloosa funding of \$500,000 this year and future years, TCS can better recruit and retain coaches. More than one-fifth of TCS students participate in athletics, over 2,000 children. Mayor Maddox stated that since they are with adults longer, they deserve to have the most qualified individuals to teach them a particular sport, both in the classroom and out. He added that many times, parents will choose school systems based on their athletic programs. Mayor Maddox stated that if the city schools are not competitive in this arena, then those parents will potentially choose another location to send their children.
- **Skilled Trades** - 353 students went through a ten week training course that prepares them toward a future discipline such as security alarms, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, and more.
- **Northern Riverwalk** - Mayor Maddox acknowledged the Northern Riverwalk would not have happened without the generosity of the Randall family donating \$2.7 million worth of property. He expressed his sincere thanks and shared that there are more exciting announcements coming that will allow us to kick off phase two in the future.
- **River District Park** - River District Park recently had a groundbreaking and the park has been well received in the community.
- **Sokol Park** - Due to supply chain issues the lights in the first area have not been replaced; however, they should be installed sometime in early 2023. The second phase of Sokol Park will include a parking lot near the football and flag football fields, which is at the southern end of North Sokol Park. The project is currently estimated at \$2.5 million.
- **Tuscaloosa National Airport** - Mayor Maddox stated that Dave Pass (Advisory Council member and Airport Advisory Council member) can give more detailed updates. Mayor Maddox hopes to have more announcements in the future on grant funding opportunities, for which Elevate will provide matching funds.
- **Public Safety** - Mayor Maddox reminded the group that 20% of Elevate Tuscaloosa funding goes directly into the payroll for police and fire departments. He is concerned that this staffing area is struggling since there are thirty four vacant police officer positions. Tuscaloosa offers some of the highest pay in the area, but with issues regarding the retirement system and a lack of individuals wanting to go into the profession, it is difficult finding the right employees. Tuscaloosa requires a very high training standard that will not be compromised, but a higher interest from individuals is needed. Mayor Maddox applauded the work of officers and noted that they are hardworking and doing a fantastic job, but the workforce challenges certainly have the city's attention.
- **Reserves** - Elevate Tuscaloosa reserves 15% net revenues for operations and maintenance costs for projects. Mayor Maddox stated that the reserves will provide the ability to not only



build new facilities, but to operate them, as well. He gave an example of the crews that take care of River District Park and Northern Riverwalk. The equipment, salaries, and maintenance, all come out of the 15% net, not the General Fund budget. He noted that in ten years, whoever holds elected office will not have to worry about trying to figure out how to pay for maintenance because of these reserves.

- **Lakes** - New docks will be installed at Rock Quarry Boat landing. In addition, the master plan of Lake Nicol and Harris Lake is close to completion. Mayor Maddox mentioned that Lake Tuscaloosa is not easily accessible to most of the public. He would like to know what the city can do to make it more accessible and give guests a first class experience.
- **Gateway** - Mayor Maddox acknowledged that while the Gateway has a solid structure, it is in need of a refresh, not just aesthetically but programmatically. Internal discussions have begun; with Councilor Tyner's help, he hopes to have more updates in the future.
- **Civil Rights Trail** - Tentatively the city and the Civil Rights Foundation board have agreed to move forward on design of the Linton Barbershop space. Rev. Linton's memorabilia that the city was able to purchase have been collected and archived with the help of the Foundation board, volunteers, and city staff. Mayor Maddox expressed that the goal is to have local government fund the construction costs, and then turning it over to the Civil Rights Foundation to operate it.
- **Benjamin Barnes YMCA** - The Benjamin Barnes YMCA will be opening in December of 2024. Projected at \$10 million, the new facility is expected to have about 24,000 square feet. Once again, the City of Tuscaloosa will build the facility, and then the Benjamin Barnes YMCA will be responsible for all operating costs.
- **Western Riverwalk** - Pedestrian Bridge construction should begin at the first of the year and be complete by the end of 2023. This will link the Saban Discovery Center and River District Park. The bridge budget of \$10.6 million includes funding from the BUILD grant.
- **University Boulevard Corridor Project** - In 2021, Elevate received a \$17 million federal RAISE grant to improve two segments of University Boulevard. One segment is downtown and the other is in Alberta. Grant funds are expected to assist in providing underground utilities, better pedestrian access, lighting, and street landscaping. Mayor Maddox expressed concern that with inflation, the \$17 million from RAISE and the \$10 million from Elevate, may not be enough. He shared that a potential funding source for an additional \$10 million is the Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). If approved, this would be designated for the Alberta segment. Mayor Maddox stated that the official vote of the MPO will happen in March. Even so, Mayor Maddox anticipates that the budget overage will be significant, so additional efforts will be needed to identify solutions.
- **Tuscaloosa Tennis Center** - The expansion will be worked into two phases due to rising inflation. Mayor Maddox praised Mike Goldammer's efforts (PARA). Mayor Maddox noted that the goals of the project are twofold; helping the community and bringing tournaments into Tuscaloosa.
- **Snow Hinton Park** - Final plans for Snow Hinton are expected in May 2023. Mayor Maddox shared that there will be some private sector development in this area over the next few years so it is a great time to improve the park.



- **Saban Discovery Center** - Mayor Maddox began by expressing his thanks to Audrey Buck (Director of Saban Center) and her team on their exceptional work in continuing to bring this project to life. The Saban Center project is going to have a great deal of private support. Mrs. Buck noted that the design team would conduct the first design workshop in two weeks.

Advisory Council Discussion

This fall the City Council authorized the city to move forward with a 72,000 square foot event center containing a 20,000 square foot open event space. Recent discussions have turned to increasing the open event space to 30,000 square feet, which would also significantly increase the total square footage in order to provide supporting spaces. The expansion would require the overall footprint to grow to over 100,000 square feet. No funding has been identified to-date to cover the cost of expanding. A decision will have to be made by the end of 2022 to maintain the project timeline.

Mayor Maddox explained the City Council is also reviewing a hybrid plan that would include the cost of design for the larger space, but it would only operate as the smaller facility until additional funds are secured. For example, the bathrooms and kitchen facilities would be built to the larger specs, and the foundation would support the eventual expansion.

Jonathan Grammer (Program Manager and Owner's Rep with Volkert) shared that the hybrid solution would provide an additional 10,000 square feet for operational support areas (kitchen, catering, restrooms, and utility). The total square feet would increase to 82,000 at an additional cost of \$12.9 million. In the future when additional funding is available, the city could add on an additional 10,000 square feet to the ballroom space, plus 8,000 square feet of extra meeting space.

Heather Dill (Advisory Council member) asked if the facility would have to close when expanding. Mrs. Buck replied that while in the design phase they would determine the best way to do that while staying open. She stated that the 20,000 ballroom could be divided into multiple spaces but she is eager to challenge the architects to see how adding on can be most efficient. Mr. Grammer added that the walls in the 20,000 square feet space could be expandable to add on an additional ten and temporary partitions could be added to keep the space operational during construction.

Mrs. Dill asked the group if they had seen the Sheraton Ballroom in Birmingham. She went on to say that their ballroom is 25,000 square feet and is divisible, so twelve spaces or more could be made for breakouts. She expressed concern that there would not be enough events that would need one large space, but smaller breakout spaces for 50-100 people for conferences would be important to have. Mrs. Buck explained that the design team will be reviewing all of these ideas. Her main concern is that more meeting spaces requires more equipment, increasing costs.

Mayor Maddox asked everyone to encourage the County Commissioners to engage our City Council. Councilor Tyner is taking the lead on a proposal to the county. Mayor Maddox asked the group to think of large facilities in other cities and how those required multiple entities to come together. Having the county as a partner in this would be a positive for both sides. Mayor Maddox shared that while Northport may not be able to invest in such a large project, any assistance in funding the airport or PARA would free up funds for the city.



Nicole Prewitt (Advisory Council member) spoke and had a question about parking and landscaping for the Event Center and Saban Center. Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) stated that there are two approaches with parking. Surface parking that includes River District Park, parking under the Hugh Thomas Bridge, the amphitheater, and the lot below Embassy Suites encompasses 700 parking spaces within 0.15 miles of the Event Center. He referenced that Mrs. Buck and her team are looking at creative shuttle ideas, along with his team. He also said the private sector might be interested in building paid parking, so many ideas are on the table and more are welcomed. Mayor Maddox added that a highlight in staying at one of the hotels is available parking. Elevate increased funding for public transportation and multiple options are available through either an internal service downtown or partners like Lyft and Uber. Low-speed vehicles provided by private companies like Joy Ride may also be an easy and affordable option.

Jimmy Warren (Advisory Council member) asked that if the Event Center were increased to the larger event space, there has been talk of that affecting other Elevate projects. He asked if it would affect current projects or potential future prospects. Mayor Maddox replied that the projects he was referencing included Sokol Park improvements, Bowers Park, McAbee Center and Phase 2 of the McDonald Hughes Center. He stated that using phases might be necessary.

Ms. Dill asked how successful the larger size space would be without a dedicated commercial air service. Mayor Maddox replied that the Johnson Consulting reports took all of that into account, including the current airport situation. Katy Beth Jackson (City of Tuscaloosa) added that when the city asked Johnson Consulting to update the economic impact of a 30,000 square foot facility, they were extremely conservative in the number of additional events it would generate. Primarily Johnson Consulting's assessment is that the larger space would allow the center to attract athletic events that it could not at 20,000 square feet. Their work showed that it would draw different kinds of events with more economic impact.

Kelsey Rush (Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports and Advisory Council member) stated that the data shows that if a larger space was built, it would be used by appropriate events.

Ms. Dill shared that it is the total space people need, not just one large space. She is concerned that if the county were to commit more funding to build a 30,000 square foot ballroom, there might not be enough events, unless the extra footage is used as exhibit space or trade show space.

Amy Echols (Advisory Council member) stated that their salesperson at Kentuck Art Center mentions conferences time after time, and felt the city misses out on a lot of business.

Ms. Dill replied that many organizers will not consider a space if it is not within a certain radius from an airport. She went on to say she is a huge supporter of the program and the city needs an event center; however, for trade shows, her concern is that people flying into Birmingham may not want to drive to Tuscaloosa.

Ms. Rush added that while the Event Center will be a game changer, support is necessary regardless of the size. Her concern is that if the county does not provide funding, does the city risk not making improvements at Bowers or Sokol when the estimation for sports and tourism is so far from that of



the University of Alabama. She stated that internally the enhancements to Sokol and Bowers should take precedent for Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports.

Mayor Maddox shared that another consideration is that if the city must invest in athletics for the facility to sell, what does Tuscaloosa have to offer compared to Hoover's ball fields? He went on to say event centers typically lose millions each year. The upkeep such as new roofs and new HVAC are expensive, but as a city we want the best return on our investment. Does the city continue to invest in community centers or does the city invest in improvements that are more sustainable, like turf fields that will last 20 years or automatic gate systems in the parks? Mayor Maddox stated that more conversations will need to happen in the coming years, but it is something the city needs to think about long term.

Sarah Patterson (Advisory Council member) stated that she was curious to see who in the meeting supported a 20,000 square feet space versus a 30,000 square feet space. She favored the 30,000 size, because if people are going to fly in, we should provide the largest size for the most amount of people. Ms. Patterson questioned whether the 20,000 square feet would turn people away and was curious as to where other Advisory Council members stood.

Councilor Tyner encouraged the group to reach out to Mr. Adams to see what events the city could secure with the larger size and what business might be lost at the smaller size. Councilor Tyner was very optimistic about the county; he feels that not building a 30,000 square feet space is a mistake. Ms. Rush stated that there was a small group meeting with several county commissioners as well.

Carly Standridge (City of Tuscaloosa) stated that she was more than happy to go over the County funding proposal with anyone so that they may have the level of education needed to share facts.

Lesley Bruinton (Advisory Council member) asked if the city is more attractive now considering the investments being made through Elevate Tuscaloosa. Is the airport attractive to commercial airlines? How does the Intermodal fit into this and will the city see more private partnerships considering all that is happening downtown and connecting it better.

Mr. Pass said that before the pandemic, the city was going to explore a downtown parking system in an app-based format. The pandemic unfortunately halted those plans and while the downtown parking system is not very good at the moment, it is something long term we must address. The intermodal facility has been a success. Ms. Bruinton mentioned the retail and commercial space in the IMF and asked if that was an option. Mayor Maddox explained that it has been successful but that is in most part due to government subsidies. Mr. Moore added that the challenge is in the leasing structure because it is a federal building. Traditional lease rates at the time were competitive because rates downtown had not spiked. The lease rate now has doubled so it is not as attractive.

Mr. Pass mentioned the terminal grant at the Tuscaloosa Airport. He appreciated the Mayor and Councilor Tyner's match this time, and said that if they are unsuccessful, there are three more opportunities. He recommended increasing funding for matches because the success of airport grants depends on a good ratio of local funding to grant funds. Mr. Pass shared that the city attended a conference looking at potential airline carriers and since the start of Covid-19, they



secured seven meetings. Unfortunately, the incentive package of \$1 million that was offered by the city was not viewed as favorably as other cities that were offering \$2 million and \$3 million incentive packages. He gave the example of Oklahoma giving \$4 million just to secure American Airlines. He mentioned that while the city could go with a low cost carrier, he questioned if that would hurt the opportunity for hub service, which is needed. Mr. Pass shared that they are continuing to do the work that is needed so when an opportunity presents itself, the city will be ready.

Mayor Maddox recommended an Airport Authority to run the airport because most large cities do not run their own airport. The city of Tuscaloosa provides \$850,000 per year to the airport, not including a specific truck required by FAA standards for \$1.8 million. The FAA requires this truck to be on the runway anytime planes of a certain size land. An airport authority would enable the city to share the airport cost burden and allow the city to invest in other areas.

Ms. Dill asked if the Pre-K initiative had a model where other cities could implement our program in their own area. She said the Tuscaloosa city program is a huge accomplishment and other cities might like to follow suit. Mayor Maddox stated there have been multiple opportunities to share the Pre-K initiative. Between Elevate and the General Fund, the city provides \$7.4 million in discretionary funding to the school system. Examples include all of the elementary education art teachers, security, \$1.4 million in debt service for the buildings, and funding a class at TCTA, Pre-K, Dual Enrollment and Summer Learning. Mayor Maddox continued to share that the city has a long history of supporting schools. He stated that most school systems are 80%-90% funded by the State of Alabama and other school systems lack the local funding to expand Pre-K. Ms. Dill asked that since the city has been doing the Pre-K Initiative for a long time is there data available to show how to expand the program.

Mayor Maddox replied that our school system has one of the most difficult jobs because we teach so many children across so many spectrums. Meeting those needs is difficult, but different schools have a different baseline of providing a variety of curriculum. Mayor Maddox said that overall the school system has done a wonderful job and we are beginning to see that in test scores.

Mayor Maddox asked the group how the committee should move forward in the future. Is the current structure sufficient or should it change? Scheduled time was almost over, so he asked for members to think upon the idea and plan to revisit it in 2023. Mayor Maddox stated that he wants the meetings to be productive and effective and meet the needs of everyone.

Mr. Moore shared that the meeting tempo is dependent on the project. For example, he said the Connectivity Group has met regarding BUILD grants, RAISE grants, airport grants and many of their project tasks have been completed or are in progress. His area of focus is the parks and what the committee wants to do in that area.

Ms. Brinton mentioned she would like to reset the group, now that projects have been funded. For example, what the committee is for, who is interested in what area, and give everyone a chance to share what they want to do now. Her concern is that the last few meetings have been rushed, so she asked if it was possible for a ninety minute meeting where information could be shared and



digested. She applauded the great work but felt it was an ambitious discussion to get through in the allotted time.

Mr. Moore asked the group to visit www.ElevateTuscaloosa.com for continued updates to numbers or stats they may need. Mr. Moore also asked that if there is something the committee wants to see discussed, or done differently, to please send an email. He praised the feedback from last year and welcomed new ideas.

Mr. Pass described today's meeting as a State of the Union. He would like to see the committee discuss one or two projects to give them an opportunity for input.

Mayor Maddox noted the benefit of the committee is for bigger policy decisions to be made. He welcomes all input both negative and positive. Mr. Moore added that in the future an hour meeting with two to three topics may be best, considering many projects are already completed. The group asked that all meetings be sent as a calendar invite so it goes on their calendar, and not through the body of an email, as some may not have noticed it.

Tripp Powell (Advisory Council member) recommended that if improvements to existing facilities need to be made, he would like to see the Advisory Council invited to travel to those facilities. He encourages the group to see how the facility will change. He believes that seeing projects firsthand has more buying power.

Mr. Moore noted that the Advisory Council has only two vacancies, giving a total of twenty eight. Attendance is low and he feels that there needs to be more participation. Mr. Pass shared that while the city can always fill positions as needed, he feels they have a good representation of the city.

Next Steps

The next Advisory Council meeting has not yet been scheduled.

**Advisory Council Meeting Attendance
November 16, 2022
City Council Chambers - City Hall**

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

Advisory Council Meeting Attendance - City Council
November 16, 2022
City Council Chambers - 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