



MEETING SYNOPSIS | Advisory Council

June 17, 2021

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

Welcome and Project Updates

Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) welcomed the group and provided project updates for all active projects. The slide deck is located on the webpage mentioned above (click View Materials). When discussing grants awarded, Mr. Moore noted that the city has renewed its contract with grant consulting firm Gray Matter. We are optimistic that, by combining their expertise with our ability to be competitive in grant applications, we will continue to have success.

At the end of this portion of the meeting, Mr. Moore noted that the upcoming work sessions are broken down by subcommittee. Topics will include projects that were part of Elevate at adoption, as well as new ones that have arisen since. The goal is to set priorities and agendas for each subcommittee to discuss in separate meetings during the remainder of this year.

Work Session Part 1

Cultural Arts and Tourism projects were discussed first. Mr. Moore provided a couple of updates within the category. The experience venues feasibility study will be active again soon. Our consultants, Johnson Consulting, are still under contract. They have completed some market research and the next step is to engage with community stakeholders. They will be working with this subcommittee at the next meeting.

Two new projects have arisen for consideration. One was brought by the Tuscaloosa Civil Rights History and Reconciliation Foundation. This Foundation has presented ideas for an amazing programming lineup that could one day be housed in the Old Tuscaloosa Jail property, as well as in the Linton Barber Shop. The Foundation would like to bring their work to both sites and they look forward to meeting with the Cultural Arts and Tourism subcommittee. This project could provide tourism opportunities by tying into other sites along the Civil Rights Trail in Alabama.

The second new project arose during the Project Unity process (community engagement designed to bridge gaps between police officers and the people of Tuscaloosa while creating equal opportunities for the community). This recommendation focuses on updating the Gateway, the existing city facility in Alberta. The initial recommendation is to provide more technology and equipment that focuses on youth interests, hobbies, skills, and crafts. Project Unity members have recognized that Tuscaloosa's youth need more opportunities for creativity, expression, and enrichment. Mayor Maddox stated that he plans to recommend funding in his next budget to pay for professional services to design updates to this facility. Linda Parsons (Advisory Council member) asked how this facility is distinct from the Saban Center. Mayor Maddox responded that the Gateway's focus will be on production space, while the Saban Center will be a more immersive, experience-focused space.



In addition, the point was made that the facilities are in two distinct geographic locations and the programming at the Gateway could provide opportunities to collaborate with nearby agencies who serve local youth.

Don Staley (Advisory Council member and Director of Tuscaloosa Tourism & Sports) suggested that the Advisory Council consider adding two new projects under the Elevate umbrella. His first proposal was to construct tournament bass fishing facilities on the Black Warrior River. This includes ramps, docks, a bait shop, and other amenities. The Tuscaloosa Amphitheater could be used to stage some of the smaller events in this field. The city's lakes would not be feasible for hosting such tournaments.

Mr. Staley's second proposal was to construct a tournament Pickleball facility in Tuscaloosa. This is a growing sport played by people of all ages. The facility would need to be completely separate from the existing Tuscaloosa Tennis Center. The city of Opelika recently built a facility for a little over \$1 million. Mayor Maddox noted that we need data to support building new facilities, to ensure that they will be able to return revenue into the city's coffers.

Mr. Staley expressed excitement about the work of the feasibility study consultants. His hope is that we will closely follow the recommendations that will come in their report. Tuscaloosa can have amazing venues, be competitive in sports tourism, and generate economic impact for our city.

Jimmy Warren (Advisory Council member) asked about the status of the master plan for the Bama Theatre. This work was paused during the pandemic and has not resumed. Sandy Wolfe (Advisory Council member) noted that the theatre is currently operating at 50% capacity. The theatre seats, carpeting, and stage all need work immediately and advocated for these items to be addressed, even if the remainder of the work comes later. Other members expressed similar support for this project to advance soon. Mayor Maddox expressed confidence that the City of Tuscaloosa will be able to support work at the Bama Theatre, but the timing and sequencing of projects is critical and is an ongoing effort.

Brad Newman (Advisory Council member and President of Shelton State Community College) made remarks about the college's desire to form community partnerships in order to maximize the use of its facilities and spaces. They will be earnestly looking for new, strategic ways to help others in the community. He hopes to collaborate with other agencies that have received funding from the American Rescue Plan in order to plan and strategize the use of funds to benefit the community.

Mr. Moore noted that Mr. Staley's project ideas could straddle two subcommittees – Cultural Arts & Tourism and Parks & Recreation. The group chose to have their first meeting on the Feasibility Study topic. The following meeting can include the Bama Theatre and bass fishing facilities. In addition, time can be provided to touch on the other projects discussed above. Recurring updates will be provided for the Saban Center at all subcommittee meetings.

Parks and Recreation projects were discussed next.

Mr. Moore noted that the park survey results will need to be presented in the next one or two subcommittee meetings. The group chose the second meeting from now.



Mayor Maddox noted that two of his top priorities in the budget next year are to build a new facility for the Benjamin Barnes YMCA and to expand the Tuscaloosa Tennis Center. He would like to bring Jeff Knox (YMCA Executive Director) and LaKeda Smith (Executive Director of the Benjamin Barnes branch) to make a presentation on this facility and its programming. The tennis center expansion project has already been fully vetted by this subcommittee pre-pandemic. The mayor plans to meet with Mike Goldammer (Tuscaloosa Tennis Center Director) to confirm the details of the expansion plan and ensure the request has not changed. Both of these topics will be heard at the subcommittee's next meeting.

Mr. Moore turned to the McAbee Center project. The city had a facility assessment completed by the University of Alabama. Staff concluded from the report that new construction is a more cost effective option than a renovation of the existing building. There would also be opportunities to incorporate new sports facilities based on the feasibility study report that was previously discussed. The city is still working with a potential programming partner to be located in this new facility but their decision has not been received at this time. Members chose to re-engage on this project after they receive the results of the park survey and the funding partner makes its decision.

Other inactive projects include Harris-Nicol Water Recreation and Trails master plan and phase II for McDonald Hughes Community Center. The group concluded that after they have received the park survey results, they would like to discuss these projects again. In addition, they agreed that Mr. Staley's project ideas – Pickleball and bass fishing – would be appropriate to discuss in a Parks and Recreation Subcommittee meeting – likely in the third round from now.

Jim Page (Advisory Council member) noted that the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama is sending a group to benchmark Asheville, NC in September this year. He noted that many of these projects and topics would have parallels in Asheville and feels that it would be helpful for the group to attend the trip and get ideas from a city that has successfully accomplished some of these concepts.

Work Session Part 2

After a break, Mr. Moore began the second work session. Connectivity projects were discussed first.

The first project that the subcommittee should consider is the transit study report from consulting firm Kimley-Horn. This study should be completed within the next month.

Mayor Maddox discussed the Downtown-University Corridor project next. The City Council will be voting to apply for a RAISE grant for this project on June 22. The grant request would be for \$25 million to improve the eastern end and western end of the University Boulevard corridor. If adopted, the Mayor's budget proposal for next fiscal year will provide over \$10 million in project funding by 2023, which results in a very competitive grant application.

Recurring updates will be provided to this subcommittee for the Northern Riverwalk and the Western Riverwalk. The Northern project is expected to have a ribbon cutting in the fall.

Katy Beth Jackson (City of Tuscaloosa) provided an update on the Tuscaloosa National Airport. Advisory Council member and Airport Advisory Committee member Dave Pass was unable to attend



this meeting but emailed his updates and recommendations to the group in advance. Mr. Pass recommends keeping the airport terminal project high on the priority list. The runway reconstruction is wrapping up now, and recruiting commercial air service back to Tuscaloosa remains a key goal of the Airport Advisory Committee. A modern terminal will be critical in this effort. In addition, Mr. Pass proposed that Elevate provide \$60,000-75,000 per year to send staff to industry conferences and events to recruit airlines. Attendance at these events, according to Mr. Pass, is mandatory when recruiting and courting air service carriers. Finally, Mr. Pass recommends keeping funding in Elevate to provide local matches for grant applications as opportunities arise in this regard, specifically for the airport. Mr. Pass also wanted the council to know the airport is hosting a master plan open house event on June 28, 2021 from 4 to 6 PM. Heather Dill (Advisory Council member) expressed support for the funding to travel to events and conferences. She believes having air service in this city is a critical component of tourism and economic development.

The group decided to have a standalone subcommittee meeting for the airport.

The Financial Analysis subcommittee topics were discussed next. Mayor Maddox noted that he is considering a few proposals to the City Council during the upcoming budget process. These include:

- 1) Re-allocating the funding currently provided for public works projects to public safety projects, bringing that total to 15% annually (instead of 7.5% each annually)
- 2) Raising the amount set aside each year for operations and maintenance of Elevate projects from 10% to 15%.
- 3) Reviewing the 2022 fiscal year budget. This subcommittee meeting should be scheduled in July.

Next, Ms. Wolfe proposed a policy for purchasing public art through Elevate Tuscaloosa construction projects. A copy of her slides is attached to this synopsis. At the end of the slides, there is a list of the terms of the proposal for the policy. Several Advisory Council members spoke in favor of this policy. The mental health benefits of art were noted. Mr. Moore asked if there would be flexibility for the 1% amount, depending on the project in question. Some projects will be extremely costly, and the art calculation could be a very large amount. Ms. Wolfe responded affirmatively. The Advisory Council called for a vote to support the policy and recommend it as proposed back to the City Council. Jimmy Warren made a motion, which was seconded by multiple members. All voted in favor; none was opposed.

Next Steps

Brendan Moore noted that the Advisory Council will receive their subcommittee meeting invitations soon.

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