



## **MEETING SYNOPSIS**

**August 18, 2021 | Daugherty Conference Room**

The following is a summary of the ninth meeting of the Advisory Council Parks and Recreation subcommittee. The attendance sheet is attached. The agenda and presentation can be found on the Elevate Tuscaloosa website under Advisory Council > Meetings.

### **Welcome and Project Updates**

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Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) provided project updates. The recent McDonald Hughes Day of Play event was a wonderful and well-attended celebration of the completed renovation. Thanks were offered to PARA's staff team who assisted. The parks survey analysis work is ongoing and we anticipate having a first draft of the report next month.

### **Tuscaloosa Tennis Center (TTC)**

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Mayor Walt Maddox (City of Tuscaloosa) introduced this topic by reminding the subcommittee that a proposed facility expansion had been vetted before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since that time, the scope of the project has expanded and he plans to recommend a 10 million dollar allocation in his FY 2022 and FY 2023 budgets, which he will present to the City Council on August 27, 2021. Mayor Maddox expressed full support of and belief in both TTC Director Mike Goldammer and the transformative effect the project can have in Alberta. He also noted that the city should be strategic about investing in a few pillars and being great at them; he believes tennis should be one such pillar.

Chad Hobbs (City of Tuscaloosa attorney's office) provided an update about the tennis center property. On the map in the presentation, the red shaded area is subject to restrictions. This is due to federal funding used in the 1970s to improve that area through the Land and Water Conservation Fund program, which is administered in this state by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). ADECA's approval is required in order for us to improve the property. In 2012 when TTC was constructed, PARA obtained ADECA's approval of a master plan for the site, including the existing facility, plus 12 courts to the west and a multi-use field to the south of that. Currently, the only substantial proposed change to the original master plan is to scrap the multi-use field and build more courts instead. PARA has already started preliminary discussions with ADECA and hopes to have confirmation soon that this proposal can move forward.

Mr. Goldammer presented the details of the proposed expansion. He noted that the existing facility contains four hard courts, six clay courts, and three indoor courts. Before the pandemic, this subcommittee discussed an expansion that would bring the totals to 12 hard, 12 clay, and three indoor courts. Currently, the revised proposed expansion would



instead bring the totals to 18 hard, 12 clay, and seven indoor courts. During peak times, the facility is operating at full capacity and could accommodate many more people with the proposed expansion.

One of the primary aims of the proposal is to host tournament events. More indoor courts bring an amenity that most other tennis facilities do not have. When tournaments are scheduled to occur at facilities that have only outdoor courts, they are subject to cancelation or delays in inclement weather. Having indoor facilities brings a competitive advantage in winning tournament sanctions. Having multiple courts with the same surface is also critical. Based on preliminary discussions with the tennis coach at the University of Alabama, we could form partnerships with the UA during large events to offer competition at both TTC and UA facilities.

Mr. Goldammer presented the estimated costs of construction for this expansion, along with projected operating revenues and expenses upon arriving at a full annual cycle of operations with the larger facility. He noted that the amounts presented need to be refined and are subject to change as project details are confirmed. The construction costs were intentionally estimated at a higher amount in order to be conservative.

One change that needs to be made is swapping out the cost of the asphalt surfacing on the hard courts to concrete surfacing. In Mr. Goldammer's opinion, concrete is the preferable material because it is much easier to maintain, retains its appearance longer, and requires infrequent replacement. However, concrete courts are more expensive to construct. Two construction expenses that are not included in the amounts presented are 1) expanding parking and 2) relocating the walking track to the far west side of the property once the new courts are built over the top of the existing track. Mr. Goldammer pointed out the popularity of the walking track and recommended that it remain intact for community use.

In terms of parking for the larger facility, a couple of options are available. Short-term, he can work with nearby land owners to allow event parking on their property. From there, shuttles and/or public transportation could bring visitors to the TTC property. Over the long-term, Mr. Goldammer suggested that we could identify nearby parcels to purchase and convert them into dedicated parking lots for TTC. He noted that at other facilities that host tournaments, parking options range from on-site parking to shuttling in from off-site.

A few attendees asked questions and made comments about the project. Mayor Maddox asked about the possibility of obtaining corporate sponsors to either offset construction costs or contribute to operating costs. Mr. Goldammer responded that this is a real possibility. He has already begun preliminary discussions with four potential partners. Lesley Bruinton (subcommittee member) noted that junior tournament events generate the largest economic impact because the younger participants usually travel to town with



multiple family members. Their direct spending while in town is generally higher. Stan Adams (Director of Sports for Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports) added that guests at tennis events tend to have different demographic characteristics than some other athletic visitors, and their average local spending tends to be higher.

Shelley Jones asked where audience members sit to watch competition. Mr. Goldammer explained that spectator seating is located around the perimeter of the courts and will include shade structures. Currently, there is no shade and spectators often bring umbrellas to watch. She also asked how the facility would be marketed outside of Tuscaloosa in order to bring events. Mr. Goldammer stated that there are a few important components involved in consistently bringing events to a facility. TTC already attracts visitors who travel from five hours away for one-day events. Word of mouth is one of the biggest drivers of repeat events in a location. If the visitors and participants enjoy their stay in Tuscaloosa, they will want to return. The facility itself is important, but having good supporting infrastructure is also critical. This includes hotels, restaurants, attractions, and other things to do. In order to win bids for events, a combination of factors contribute to success. These include personal connections and relationships, presence at industry trade shows, having an attractive destination, and understanding the events that will pair well with Tuscaloosa. Mr. Adams added that getting involved in adaptive athletics is a great way to raise the impact of the tennis facility. He stated that the University of Alabama places a lot of emphasis on this, and is even hosting a USTA wheelchair tennis tournament.

Tripp Powell asked how long it would be after completing construction until full operations take effect. Mr. Adams responded that for events, a good rule of thumb is two to three years to get through a full cycle of bidding on tournament events and actually bringing them to your location.

Mayor Maddox asked both how tournament revenues work and what expected effect the expansion would have on local memberships. Mr. Goldammer stated that once a facility wins a bid and is sanctioned to host an event, the revenues generated belong to that facility's owner/operator. However, most limit the fees that can be charged to participants. He noted that he is projecting almost to double his memberships with the larger facility.

### **Benjamin Barnes YMCA**

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Mayor Maddox introduced this project by providing some of its history and background information from the city's perspective. His conversations with the YMCA date back to 2011. Last year, a couple of changes helped catalyze the project again. Tim Parker Sr. returned to the YMCA Board of Directors and led the board to hire the new CEO, Jeff Knox. Mr. Knox came to Tuscaloosa from the Greenville, SC YMCA and immediately began working toward a solution for the Benjamin Barnes Branch. In addition, the City initiated



Project Unity last year after the deaths of George Floyd Jr. and Breonna Taylor, tragedies that brought racial tension into the national spotlight. The Project Unity effort, led by community volunteers, resulted in many recommendations to improve youth opportunities, particularly in West Tuscaloosa. The Youth Sports and Recreation subcommittee identified as a top priority replacing the Benjamin Barnes facility and using it to provide life-changing athletic and educational programming for children.

LaParry Howell (City of Tuscaloosa) provided an overview of the status of the project. Upon Project Unity's recommendation, Mayor Maddox plans to propose allocating 10 million dollars in his FY 2022 and FY 2023 budgets to build a new Benjamin Barnes facility. The goal is for the city to construct the facility and the YMCA to operate it, with review and approval of programming by the city.

The location of the new facility is undetermined. Mayor Maddox has chosen six city staff members and has asked Mr. Knox to choose six YMCA representatives to serve on a committee who will choose the site location. Currently, five locations are under consideration. Two are privately owned and were not discussed or identified publicly. The other three are public properties and include: 1) the existing site 2) adjacent to the McDonald Hughes Center and 3) a property owned by Tuscaloosa City Schools near Stillman Heights Elementary School. Mayor Maddox will direct the selection committee to use data to drive the decision. Examples include both examining the density of student residences in proximity to each site and reviewing the availability of similar amenities in order to avoid redundancies. The less money spent on acquiring the land, the more funding that will be available for construction.

Mr. Howell reviewed information about the existing Benjamin Barnes facility, including photos. The YMCA received a two hundred thousand dollar grant from the national YMCA and used that for some renovations, including restoring the HVAC system. The gym was renovated a few years ago. Most funding invested into the facility has come from the federal government, totaling over two million dollars. The building is largely in its original condition. Mr. Hobbs stated that the city acquired the property in 2021 and now leases it back to the YMCA for a nominal value. According to the lease, if the city desires to dispose of the property, the YMCA has a right to repurchase or refuse to do so.

Subcommittee members asked questions and made comments about the project:

Mr. Powell asked if the Y has a fundraising model in place to sustain the operations of the new facility. Mayor Maddox responded that the downtown branch drives revenue that supports the Barnes branch. In addition, the new building will help generate new memberships but the Y will also need to capitalize on the supportive community spirit in order to fundraise.



Ms. Jones expressed support for the project and hopes the City Council will recognize its value. She stated that kids get in trouble when they do not have things to do and we need to offer them more. Therefore, the programming happening inside the facility is the most important consideration. Even now, Ms. Jones stated that the Y needs to begin building and implementing their new programming. They can collaborate with numerous other agencies to offer new programs. She believes the Alberta model with the Boys and Girls Club should be an example. Each school day, kids come from the Alberta schools and go to Boys and Girls Club for activities. She noted that reaching kids sooner and younger is critical in order to make a difference and change the course of life for a troubled child. The Mayor echoed that the Benjamin Barnes programming should drive the facility's physical design and construction. Mr. Powell noted that Jeff Knox is very assertive in seeking partnerships and asking other agencies to collaborate. The Y has already begun to provide improved programs since his hire.

Ms. Bruinton spoke about the Huntsville YMCA. She said their programming has broad appeal with both kids and adults. She believes Tuscaloosa needs something like this in West Tuscaloosa to allow families to enjoy the center together, rather than adults dropping off children and leaving. Ms. Bruinton also stated that our children do not have a vote in the governmental process and advocating on their behalf is so important.

Councilor Matthew Wilson (District 1) said that he remembers community advocate L.V. Hall. The Benjamin Barnes branch was a heartfelt issue for him and he went to Elizabeth Baptist Church every year to raise funds for the facility. Councilor Wilson believes this new building will bring a renaissance for West Tuscaloosa.

Chris England (Advisory Council co-chair) asked how much say the city would have in the day-to-day operations of the building. He also wondered if the structure of the board would change with this project. He cautioned the city to be careful with the operations aspect, noting that measures should be taken to ensure the promises and expectations are upheld and the new center is maintained at an acceptable level. Ms. Jones asked who appoints the YMCA board members. No one knew the answer but it was noted that an advisory board that is selected by the board of directors oversees the Barnes branch.

### **Next Steps**

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After the city's FY 2022 budget process concludes, we will bring the TTC expansion project back to the subcommittee to refine the proposal and confirm some of the details.

For the Benjamin Barnes project, ongoing updates will be provided to this subcommittee as the project unfolds and the questions asked will need to be discussed and resolved.

**Subcommittee Meeting Attendance**  
**August 18, 2021**

Name	In Attendance
Bruinton, Lesley	YES
Corder, Blake	NO
Dedrick, Terrance	NO
Echols, Amy	NO
Gay Jr., David	NO
Jones, Shelley	YES
Minor, Gary	YES
Parker III, Tim	NO
Powell, Tripp	YES
Rumsey, Steven	NO
Brooks, Karen (EAC co-chair)	NO
England, Chris (EAC co-chair)	YES
Wilson, Matthew (City Council District 1)	YES
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)	NO
Faile, John (City Council District 6)	NO
Lanier, Cassius (City Council District 7)	NO