

**State of the City Address  
Mayor Walt Maddox  
September 21, 2006**

One year ago, the people of Tuscaloosa made it crystal clear they wanted leadership that viewed our City not in terms of what it is, but in terms of what it can be.

With our efforts focused on the promise of tomorrow, twelve months later, it is my honor to report that the state of our City is strong and positioned for a vibrant future.

The winds of change that ushered in this dynamic time have been reinforced by the determination of two distinct groups within the City.

Council President Harrison Taylor and our City Council members continue to demonstrate leadership by advocating for the needs of their constituents while understanding that the City of Tuscaloosa is greater than all of us.

The Council and I are very fortunate to have over 1,100 employees in 15 departments who are led by a cadre of department heads that have embraced our core beliefs through innovation and effective management.

I would like for our council members and department heads to rise and be recognized for their exceptional leadership.

Before I outline our vision for the future, I want to celebrate just a few achievements of the past year.

West Tuscaloosa is now a priority.

Our administration has developed three objectives to reverse generations of neglect by improving the infrastructure, cleaning up blighted property and developing incentives for commercial and residential growth.

The City has just completed the street-scaping of Stillman Boulevard, restored West Highland Cemetery and is taking legal action in shutting down the salvage yard on Culver Road.

Our efforts in West Tuscaloosa represent a genuine commitment to ensure that progress is not limited by geographical or racial boundaries.

Tuscaloosa's economy continues to show phenomenal strength as the major revenue generators for our City demonstrate growth well above seven percent.

Our strong economic forecast coupled with the Council's commitment to sound financial practices, which include maintaining a minimum of 10 Million dollar reserve in our operating and capital funds, has earned the City a bond rating upgrade by Standard & Poors.

There is even better news on the horizon.

Dr. Witt's initiative to grow the University of Alabama's student population has been extremely successful, as evidenced by their enrollment numbers.

The increased number of students, along with the expansion of Bryant-Denny Stadium, will generate millions more for our local economy.

With progress come challenges. I am proud to say a new page is being written regarding the City's relationship with the University of Alabama. It is based on cooperation and not isolation.

To that end, Dr. Portera, Dr. Witt and I meet regularly to coordinate on issues such as comprehensive planning, public safety and economic development.

This new day in our town-and-gown relationship will truly benefit this entire community in the years to come.

Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the City is a passion for our administration.

From extending the hours of City Hall to providing more e-government services, we have made tremendous strides.

Our efforts to be open, efficient and effective is driven by this simple belief: You pay our salaries; therefore, you deserve a return on your investment.

The quality of City services depends solely on our ability to recruit and retain the best and brightest employees.

When we took office, our current personnel process, which was deemed the Civil Service System, was broken.

Enacted in 1947, the Civil Service System was designed for a City with less than 40,000 people.

One its most glaring failures was the inability of the Mayor and department heads to have legal authority in the final job descriptions and selection of employees.

With the support of our Council and Legislative Delegation, the Alabama Legislature passed The Municipal Employment Reform and Accountability Act which will:

- A. Places employment and qualification decisions in the hands of department Heads and/or the Mayor;
- B. Requires that disciplinary hearings be conducted without delays;
- C. Depoliticizes the Personnel Board by prohibiting members from participating in local political campaigns and being related to an elected City official
- D. Provides performance-based contracts for all new department heads.

This new Act has provided immediate success stories such as reducing the length of filling vacancies from months to weeks.

One of our proudest achievements is occurring within the Police Department.

For the first time in decades, the Tuscaloosa Police Department is now fully staffed with 257 police officers. Why? Under the new Act, Chief Swindle and his staff can now hire the most qualified candidates without delays that were inherent in the old Civil Service System.

We are proud of what we accomplished in Year One, but it only represents the beginning of something very special for our community.

This year, a few of our initiatives will include:

1. Creating the Office of Economic Development to promote commercial and residential growth;
2. Designing a new Code Enforcement Division within our police department to preserve and protect the integrity of our neighborhoods;

3. Advancing our efforts to revitalizing our central city with the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan;
4. Actively engaging the market for a convention center - hopefully centered around our riverfront and downtown;
5. Providing our Police and Firefighters a 6.6 percent pay increase to ensure a safe community;
6. Preparing for rapid residential and commercial growth in North Tuscaloosa by breaking ground on the Jerry Plott Water Treatment Plant and increasing our sewer capacity;
7. Addressing the major storm water drainage issues that are threatening the infrastructure of our City, especially south of the river.

We will continue to be ambitious with our agenda. To that end, let me share with you two of our top priorities for 2007.

In June, the City will unveil its 311 Call Center. In the past few months, we have secured the rights from BellSouth and hired a Call Center Manager. Instead of the 40-plus numbers listed in the phonebook, 311 will provide residents with one number to address concerns and report problems.

In addition to its customer service advantages, 311 will have one computerized work order system that will allow us to track problems and follow through on delivery of services via its integration of GIS and data base management capabilities.

To say the least, it will drastically improve how we budget our human, financial and capital resources.

The optimism that we have for the future must be tempered by the reality that Tuscaloosa faces a serious problem among our children.

Last August, 59 percent of students entering kindergarten were not on grade level. In West Tuscaloosa, the number climbs to a staggering 74 percent.

Statistically, the damage is done because 88 percent of children who are not reading on grade level in first grade will not be reading on grade level in third grade.

Making matters worse, 74 percent of children who are not reading on grade level in third grade will still be far behind in high school.

We can chart a different course, and the pillars of this community are coming together to ensure an even playing field.

Last December, the City Council authorized the Mayor's Pre-K Task Force. Our Task Force included representatives from the University of Alabama, Stillman College, Tuscaloosa City Schools, Congressman Davis, United Way, Ministerial Alliance, and community members at-large.

Our findings determined, in state after state, Pre-K is making the most far-reaching impact academically, especially with children born into poverty and broken homes.

In our own City, thanks to funding by Success-by-Six, the Tuscaloosa City Schools' five week jump start program has made significant progress with academically at-risk students about to enter Kindergarten.

Unfortunately, the State of Alabama ranks nearly last in funding Pre-K nationwide.

Our Task Force decided Tuscaloosa cannot wait for the State to address this critical issue; therefore, we formed the Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative to partner with the Tuscaloosa City Schools.

Our long-term goal will be bringing quality pre-k to every four-year old child academically at-risk.

For every one dollar invested in pre-k, government saves seven dollars in not having to fund additional programs such as the police and court systems, welfare and housing.

The Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative has received significant support from the University of Alabama, Stillman College, Tuscaloosa City Schools and Alexis Tocqueville Society.

I am recommending to our Council that for SY 2007-2008, the City fund the salaries of five additional pre-k teachers that will reach 90 of the 178 children who are eligible for pre-k services.

The work of Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative may be the most important in the history of our City, and it will continue to have our strong support.

The next 36 months will not be easy. We will have to make decisions that focus on the long-term.

However, I firmly believe the best days of Tuscaloosa are in front of us if we continue to be progressive actions and determined in our resolve, we can reach the promise of tomorrow.

Thank you.