

Mayor Walter Maddox
State of the City
September 29, 2009

I am honored to stand before you and report to you that the State of this City is strong.

This belief is not simple political rhetoric or naivety to our economic climate.

Rather, it is validated by the resiliency of our citizens, the ingenuity of our commerce, and the forward thinking of our Council Members, Department Heads and dedicated employees.

Today, we are more determined than ever to not only survive this "Great Recession," but build a stronger community that is poised to achieve a vibrant future.

Our determination can be seen in West Tuscaloosa.

Four years ago, we pledged to reverse the generations of neglect and we are keeping our promise.

Through initiatives such as Noah's Ark, we have invested millions of dollars in storm drainage projects that are upgrading the infrastructure in areas such as Royal Pines, Elm Street and Stillman Boulevard.

In fact, nearly two-thirds of the \$21 million dollars appropriated for Noah's Ark projects have been dedicated to our West Side.

Beyond the brick and mortar, we are demonstrating our political will to make a wrong, a right.

In the coming year, we will start the Greensboro Avenue street-scaping project from the Train Station to the new Fire Station.

This project will breathe new life and optimism to this vital link with West Tuscaloosa and our Central City.

Our determination begins with how we spend your tax dollars.

Tonight, the Council will adopt our FY 2010 operating budgets.

Our budgets reflect the current economic environment, and do not inflate revenue projections to meet expenditures.

Further, our budgets maintain strong reserves and low debt which has enabled us to weather this storm and earn one of the highest credit ratings in Alabama.

In the coming months, we will be utilizing that strong credit rating by issuing bonds to upgrade our park and riverfront trails, activity centers and construct a new Police Athletic League facility for Alberta.

Our determination is focused on tourism as evidenced by our ability to attract the Blue Angels, USAT Triathlons and the Super Six.

Mayor Walter Maddox
State of the City
September 29, 2009

We used to believe that a convention center was our best opportunity to capture a larger share of the tourism market.

However, our new strategy of using our streets, river and the University of Alabama's assets is paying dividends.

Our financial commitment to the tourism industry is significant.

For FY 2009, the City invested nearly a million dollars in overtime to hosts dozens of events that filled our hotel rooms.

Presently, the City funds our two tourism agencies nearly a million dollars annually, which is nearly double what we appropriate for commercial and industrial development.

The Council's commitment to tourism is strong and will continue to get stronger.

Within the next 12 to 14 months, the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater will be open and provide a state of the art venue which will host national acts, along with a variety of community events.

With 7,400 seats, and the ability to be multi-functional, we will have the opportunity to enhance our hospitality industry while simultaneously providing our citizens a world-class cultural arts facility.

The coming year will also see our two tourism agencies merge.

The board members of the Tuscaloosa Conventions and Visitors Bureau and the Tuscaloosa Sports Foundation are laying the ground work to join forces.

By eliminating duplication, and putting people over bureaucracies, we have an opportunity to take Tuscaloosa's Tourism Industry to the next level.

Our determination will be evident in transforming how we approach commercial and industrial recruitment.

Thanks to the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority, we enjoy a strong manufacturing base that has provided tens of thousands of citizens a higher quality of life.

There is little doubt that our past efforts have been successful.

That being said, I believe that our future depends upon adopting a new strategy that focuses on the recruitment of knowledge-based and aerospace industries, regionalizing our efforts with surrounding governments in West Alabama, and partnering with the University of Alabama, Shelton State and Stillman College.

Three months ago, Judge McCollum, Mayor Herndon and I presented what we believed to be a transformative economic model to the IDA Board.

Mayor Walter Maddox
State of the City
September 29, 2009

This model was the work of so many in this community who volunteered countless hours in the past eight months.

Recently, along with IDA, we shared our proposal with Governor Riley and ADO Director, Neal Wade and it was received well by Montgomery.

The challenge for all of us is to move from drafting to implementation.

I firmly believe that we cannot hesitate in this transformation, nor simply rescind to the practices of the past.

To do so, would jeopardize our ability to compete with the rest of Alabama for a diverse and robust economy.

Within the next 18 months, we should see the awakening of the commercial retail market.

It has been much discussed and acknowledged that Tuscaloosa's commercial market is deficient of many major retailers and businesses.

This mean hundreds of millions of dollars are leaving this County annually.

This deficiency has existed well before we entered this recession.

We have spent the past year trying to understand why this has happened and what we can do to chart a new direction.

Time is of the essence.

Tuscaloosa needs a more competitive model now so we will be ready when this recession ends.

When you look across Alabama, nearly every City with any sizeable population is providing economic development grants to attract retailers.

Unfortunately, Tuscaloosa's current economic development policy is severely lacking.

If we continue with the status quo, we will likely lose opportunities for new and/or re-developed shopping centers due to major retailers being more selective than ever when looking at expansion.

Within in the next few months, I will be presenting the Council a revised policy that will make us more competitive while ensuring the taxpayer gets a return on investment.

In addition to revising our economic development policy, within the next six weeks, I will be presenting the City Council a plan to create the Office of Developmental Services.

Our goal is to provide a central location within City Hall to ease the myriad of red-tape that can suffocate the entrepreneur spirit.

Mayor Walter Maddox
State of the City
September 29, 2009

Our plan will be to promote efficiency through the location of the office, cross-training of departmental personnel, and the implementation of tracking software linking the process to all involved.

What is going to be even more impressive is that we will accomplish this with existing employees.

In the brief time I had this morning; my remarks have been targeted towards economic development, considering it is foremost on everyone's mind.

However, in the coming year, we will have the same energy and enthusiasm for change as when we entered City Hall four years ago.

Our energy will be seen with the completion of the first phase of downtown redevelopment and the groundbreaking of the new federal courthouse.

Our energy will be seen with the Hope Initiative which has been strengthened with a COPS Grant which will place 12 new police officers on our streets

In addition, we will open our East Tuscaloosa Police Precinct in Alberta which will be the new home for 50 of our police officers.

As we continue our mission of eliminating crime, poverty and blight, the City will lean on the faith-based community.

To date, over 60 churches have adopted dozens of neighborhoods in seven Hope Zones.

The Hope Initiative is beginning to make a difference.

In the Rosedale Hope Zone, where 11 percent of the City's crime occurred in 2008, we have seen a 20 percent reduction in crime because 10 churches and 16 social services reached out to a community that was on the edge.

Our energy will be seen with the Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative.

Thanks to the vision of the Superintendent and Board, the financial resources of the City Council, University and United Way, and private support from so many of you, our nationally recognized program is providing the foundation which will drastically reduce our high school dropout rate in the years to come.

Whether it is enhancing 311, expanding recycling or investing in our Fire and Rescue Services, our energy, our enthusiasm and our results will be felt in all corners of this great community.

Mayor Walter Maddox
State of the City
September 29, 2009

It is indeed an honor to represent the City of Tuscaloosa and to serve all of you.

I am humbled to be provided another four years by the people of this community.

I know that I am entrusted with a sacred responsibility and opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of our citizens.

To that end, I can assure you that in the coming years, I will continue to be a relentless advocate of moving all of Tuscaloosa forward.

The state of this City is strong and by working together, we are indeed building a bridge to a brighter future.