

**Mayor Walter Maddox
State of the City
November 8, 2011**

For the past five years, from this podium, I have reported to you that the state of our City was strong.

In the past 195 days, in a very powerful way, our report was validated by our citizens who refused to yield in the face of withering adversity and have met every challenge with a confident hope and compassionate heart that continues to inspire our City, State and Nation.

Further evidence of our strength was found in the courage, dedication and ingenuity of our employees who performed at the highest level.

To that end, I would like our department heads, incident commanders and all city staff to rise so that we can show you our appreciation for a job well-done.

Even among heroes, there are those who demonstrate an unwavering commitment beyond the imaginable.

Robert Brown, who is a TDOT Equipment Operator on our Downtown Right-of-Way Crew, was at work when the storm hit.

Five hours later, Robert discovered that his house on Juanita Drive was destroyed.

After going home for a few minutes to make sure his family was safe, Robert reported back and continued to work without notifying his supervisors of his situation.

The Monday following April 27th, I received an email from a friend of Robert's family who wanted to know if he could take some time off to buy his children new clothes and school supplies.

The email was sent because Robert did not want to leave his crew who were doing phenomenal work in the most hazardous of conditions.

When we learned the full story of his heroism, we were all inspired and honored to work with a man who clearly put our City before himself.

Robert, on behalf of a grateful community, I would ask that you rise and allow us to thank you for your service to Tuscaloosa.

Clearly, April 27th now defines all of us.

We will never be the same, and nor should we be.

Too many have lost so much, too many have experienced so much and too many have sacrificed so much.

The winds of change, in the most literal and tragic sense, have reshaped our community physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Together, as we stood on the precipices, we became united by our common bonds and have demonstrated resiliency, compassion and hope beyond all measure.

Remembering the ties that bind us will be crucial as we enter the long road to recovery.

Against the backdrop of the worst economy since the Great Depression, and at a time when the Federal and State governments have the least amount of resources, we will have to rebuild the 12 percent of the City that was destroyed, and internally, we will have to replace over \$40 million of our own facilities, vehicles and infrastructure.

Complicating matters will be recreating a market for affordable housing with ten thousand of our citizens in temporary homes.

Of the thousands of homes destroyed, 61 percent were rental with a median income of less than \$28,000.

Further, and even more devastating, is the \$300 million dollars in unmet housing needs left by the gaps in insurance coverage or FEMA.

As with all cities that experience massive catastrophic damage, our recovery will take years, but we are determined to rebuild Tuscaloosa in a way that honors all those who lost so much.

We can take great pride that the myriad of State and Federal agencies working with us believe that our response and recovery is the model for the nation, and our statistics demonstrate this.

As of last week, the City had issued 220 rebuild/repair commercial permits and 2094 rebuild/repair residential permits with a valuation of over \$82 million.

In the next six to twelve months, the majority of insurance and floodway issues will be resolved, clearing the way for new construction.

Although the private sector will drive the commercial and residential development, the City, through Tuscaloosa Forward, is working to create modern land uses, zoning and building codes to reflect our urban core.

Further, Tuscaloosa Forward sets in place strategic infrastructure improvements that will correct longstanding problems and add pedestrian amenities such as parks, sidewalks and greenways.

In one of the most transparent and inclusive processes in the City's history, Tuscaloosa Forward is a generational initiative that mirrors the successful, comprehensive planning efforts on the riverfront and downtown.

The events of April 27th are foremost on our minds; however, our work continues throughout the City.

For the past Fiscal Year, the City will likely have a four to five million dollar surplus as a result of holding expenditures down and being realistic on revenue projections.

Our FY 2012 General Fund budget continues the long-standing conservative philosophy that has helped to maintain strong reserves and a high credit rating.

In West Tuscaloosa, we continue to work on several major drainage projects and the Greensboro Avenue Streetscaping.

In the next few months, the West Tuscaloosa Police Precinct will open on Culver Road near the entrance to Stillman College.

On our riverfront, the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater has been a resounding success, and we look forward to the opening of the River Market and Transportation Museum.

In our first year of Amphitheater operations, we will earn a small surplus, which is years ahead of our most optimistic projections.

Further, our two percent lodging tax, which covers 80 percent of the debt service, is growing well above projections which mean by 2016,

the City will be able to set aside further revenues for operations and maintenance.

Even better, the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater hosted two dozen concerts, athletic events and community programs that have truly made it everyone's venue and has further elevated our community's quality of life.

Tuscaloosa's economy continues to expand.

With the addition of the C-Class in 2014 and the hybrid vehicle in 2015, Tuscaloosa County will see 1,500 new well-paying jobs and likely another 1,500 supplier jobs.

The growth of the University of Alabama continues to expand our economy and helps to sustain our commercial and lodging markets.

In FY 2012, the University will be partnering with the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority to recruit more technology- and knowledge-based industries.

Although this new partnership is in its infancy, I believe there will be a strong return on investment as we work to diversify our industrial base.

The City continues to be focused on tourism and believes the new Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports Commission is well-positioned to grow our market share.

In a few weeks, we will be hosting the Super Six, which will generate millions of new dollars in our community. This spring, the Blue Angels will return bringing tens of thousands of fans to Tuscaloosa County.

I want to thank the County and Northport for their financial and logistical support of this amazing event.

Customer service continues to be a strong focus.

The City has recently upgraded 311's software which is providing more data, web-based options and real time reporting on how we are providing services.

Last year, 311 received over 100,000 calls and issued more than 20,000 citizen driven work orders, which connected citizens with their government, and we want to do more; we have to do more.

In the post April 27th environment, we will have to search for ways to improve how we do business.

From establishing the best pre-k program in the nation, to funding advanced academic programs, the City Council continues to partner with our City Schools, and we are excited about Dr. McKendrick's arrival.

With the opportunity to rebuild two new schools, I am hopeful for bold thinking and ideas for Alberta and University Place.

From magnet programs to arts and sciences, all options need to be on the table, because the City Schools can redefine the opportunities we provide all of our students.

In the past few minutes, you have provided me the privilege of outlining just a few of our accomplishments and plans for the future.

What we have done, and what we will do, is a collective effort of so many, but our foundation is grounded in the leadership of our City Council.

Tuscaloosa is truly fortunate to have men and women of this caliber, and I am very thankful for their tireless efforts.

This morning, we can take great comfort that we live in Tuscaloosa during this moment in our history.

All of us have been charged with a responsibility to rebuild our City and shape our future for generations to come.

With your help, I believe we will rise to the challenge.

Indeed, the State of our City is strong, and we are getting stronger.