

Opposition mounts for Mental Health Department plans in Tuscaloosa

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al.com By **al.com staff**

TUSCALOOSA, Alabama -- Opponents of the state Department of Mental Health's announced plan to convert a psychiatric hospital into a facility to house the criminally insane are rallying forces to oppose the switch.

Two articles in The Tuscaloosa News today indicate elected officials and individual citizens alike hold strong sentiments against such a change in plans for the new facility being built on the site of the former W.D. Partlow Developmental Center in Alberta.

In a five-hour petition drive outside a grocery in the Alberta community on Saturday, City Councilman Kip Tyner collected **more than 300 signatures in opposition to the plan.**

Meanwhile, Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox pushed for officials to reconsider, saying in the midst of efforts to rebuild after the April 27, 2011, tornadoes, the plan constitutes bad news.

"It is my belief that a criminally insane facility placed into a gateway of the campus and our city is not in the best interest of the Capstone and Alberta City," **Maddox told the Tuscaloosa News.**

Mental Health Commissioner Zelia Baugh announced the change in plans on Feb. 15 to repurpose the hospital originally intended as a replacement for Bryce Hospital, an inpatient facility providing adult psychiatric care that opened in Tuscaloosa more than 150 years ago.

Baugh has said four of the six state-run mental health hospitals must be closed by fall. Many patients can be transferred to community-based care, she has said.

The replacement hospital, which is scheduled to open in May 2013, is designed for 268 beds. Baugh has said the state intends to move 115 court-committed forensic patients currently at Taylor Hardin and 115 lower level court-committed forensic patients at other state facilities to the new facility.

See the complete Tuscaloosa News article.

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Only the Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Facility and the under-construction replacement for Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa would remain open under current plans. The old Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa is shown here. (Birmingham News file photo/Tamika Moore)