



Tuscaloosa hopes for continued help for tornado recovery from state Legislature (photos)

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By



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Alabama Rep. John Merrill, right, talks to Maddox prior to the meeting's start.

Local Legislative Delegation in Tuscaloosa gallery (13 photos)

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TUSCALOOSA, Alabama -- The city hopes to get continued help with tornado recovery through the state Legislature in 2012, which opens its session on Tuesday.

That and other topics were the focus of today's meeting between **Mayor Walt Maddox**, the Tuscaloosa City Council and the legislative delegation.

Maddox at City Hall on Monday outlined legislative priorities for the city, including the city's sales tax, rebuilding Bryce Hospital, protection of Lake Tuscaloosa and the city's opposition to "unfunded mandates."

After a breakfast and meet-and-greet, city officials and state legislators listened to Maddox's presentation, which outlined ways the delegation could help Tuscaloosa's recovery from the April 27,

2011 tornado.

Ways included increasing the cap, per county, for Alabama Housing Financing Authority; contacting the USDA to support Tuscaloosa regarding a population exemption for affordable housing loan programs; funding the McFarland Boulevard/15th Street intersection improvements; working with the Congressional delegation for supplemental funding; and eliminating as much of the local cleanup and rebuilding costs as possible.

Maddox also told legislators that the city believes that Bryce Hospital should be rebuilt to meet both present and future mental health needs. Maddox shared that a 2008 study by Department of Mental Health consultants recommended that Bryce should be rebuilt with a capacity of 350 beds, and there is a very serious concern that would be an undersized facility.

Protecting Lake Tuscaloosa is critical, the city says, including having more say in zoning and permits nearby.

The lake is the primary source of drinking water for 94 percent of the county.

The city will spend more than \$550,000 in operational costs for FY 2012 maintaining and protecting the lake, Maddox said. He said studies indicate that uncontrolled development is impacting the water quality of Lake Tuscaloosa, including pollution and sediment runoff.



Tuscaloosa City Councilman Kip Tyner discusses bingo with Alabama legislators and his fellow councilmen. (Ben Flanagan/al.com)

To protect Tuscaloosa County's most vital natural resource, Maddox said land use regulations around the lake are needed to preserve and protect it.

The city backs a bill which would authorize the city to adopt zoning laws, ordinances and regulations outside its corporate limits to extend up to 2,000 feet from the acquisition line of Lake Tuscaloosa.

Also:

The city opposes statewide business licensing, but hopes for streamlined sales tax collection.

City wants drug sales exempted from gross receipts for determination of business licenses

The city also hopes the Legislature will avoid passing unfunded mandates to cities. The city wants money from the state for criminal corrections, mental health systems, transportation and maintenance, and the Department of Forensic Sciences

Also, the city supports a bill that would exempt groceries from sales taxes, as long as revenues for cities is protected.

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