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Tuscaloosa legislators will hear city's wish list

Mayor will outline local priorities at Monday meeting

By Jason Morton

Staff Writer

Published: Saturday, January 30, 2016 at 8:00 p.m.

Eliminating unfunded mandates from the state, ensuring the state's road department fulfills its financial commitments and granting zoning powers for areas around Lake Tuscaloosa are among the City Council's top priorities for the upcoming session of the Alabama Legislature.

The city's annual Legislative Breakfast, during which it urges the nine members who represent portions of Tuscaloosa to support or oppose specific items of legislation, is set for 7:30 a.m. Monday at the Tuscaloosa River Market on Jack Warner Parkway.

At the direction of the City Council, Mayor Walt Maddox is expected to stress the City Council's position on these matters, with the unfunded mandate elimination taking top priority.

Many of the unfunded mandates – the practice of requiring municipalities to offer services without providing the necessary funding – stem from the state's shortfalls in mental health funding.

Waiting lists for mental health services prevent many needing the help from getting it.

With nowhere to go, emergency responders often have to take those needing such help to either the DCH Regional Medical Center or the Tuscaloosa County Jail.

Maddox also is expected to stress the city's need for the Alabama Department of Transportation to deliver on its promise of matching funds for road construction projects tied to the Transforming Tuscaloosa County legislation that was approved last year.

That law, which takes effect June 1, combines the county's 2-cent sales tax, which is now shared among five local government entities and DCH Regional Medical Center, with a 1-cent temporary sales tax that is now dedicated primarily for school construction.

The 1-cent sales tax becomes permanent and the shared allocation of the combined 3-cent tax would be altered to include a seventh governmental body, the Tuscaloosa County Road Improvement Authority.

Included in the legislation that reallocated the county's sales tax structure was a list of projects – \$200 million worth of infrastructure projects over 10 years – that will be funded through this new authority. Each of these projects originally was an ALDOT project, meaning a portion of the proceeds must come from state transportation funds.

Maddox also is expected to highlight the city's wish for extra territorial zoning powers around Lake Tuscaloosa.

Citing the entire county's reliance on the lake as a water source – about 94 percent of

Tuscaloosa County gets its water from the lake – and its popularity as a recreational site, the City Council wants to be able to monitor and regulate all development within a 1,000-foot perimeter around lake.

Currently, the city's zoning powers only apply to areas within the actual city limit.

Other issues on the City Council's legislative agenda include:

- Support for limiting damages to \$100,000 for any city employee who is sued for actions relating to the employee's work.
- Support for changes that would allow enterprise zones to be expanded in order to allow for tax incentives on qualified retail developments within federally declared disaster areas.
- Support for Tuscaloosa preference before the Alabama Housing Finance Authority's Qualified Allocation Plan as long as the Presidential Disaster Declaration remains in place.
- Support for legislation that would allow the enforcement of parking regulations within the city of Tuscaloosa as a civil violation.
- Support for legislation to create a hybrid alcohol license for restaurants that morph into bars after certain hours.
- Support for regulating the payday and title loan industries in order to protect consumers from excessive fees, high interest rates and predatory lending.
- Opposition to any legislation that would deprive local governments of their ability to establish the amounts of business license fees or sales tax amounts within their respective taxing jurisdictions.
- Opposition to drug sales exemptions from the gross receipt total that is used to determine business license fees.
- Opposition to limitations on business license fees derived from deliveries to a business inside the municipality.
- Support for legislation that would require sellers or landlords to disclose the occupancy limitations for which the property is zoned.
- Support for an amendment to minimum wage rates that would include a cost-of-living adjustment tied to the consumer price index.
- Opposition to any legislation that would deprive local governments of the ability to establish, collect and administer gasoline rates.
- Support for clarifications or amendments to rules or laws governing the issuance of intoxicating beverages for certain municipalities; the requirement of a warrant in-hand before an arrest; the permission of a city attorney or assistant city attorney to provide pro bono work at the direction of the Alabama State Bar; the definitions regarding endangering the welfare of a child and summons and complaints for ordinance violations.

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.

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