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Montgomery looks to its future with the creation of Envision 2050

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(Photo: Brian Edwards / Advertiser)

Montgomery officials announced Thursday that they will create a comprehensive city plan, dubbed Envision 2050, that will examine the needs of the city and propose ways to prepare it for the future.

If the Envision name sounds familiar, it should. The new governmental group will take over the work of Envision 2020, a volunteer organization started 17 years ago, which generated ideas to solve some of the area's most pressing issues, with its stated focus as bringing together citizens, experts, businesses and government leaders to create goals that would better the River Region.

Robert Smith, planning director for Montgomery, will lead Envision 2050 as it looks toward the city's future.

"Montgomery is the big cog in the River Region," Smith said. "If Montgomery isn't strong, the region isn't."

Montgomery's strengths and weaknesses will be examined in a study, Smith said, which will cover several topics, including land use, infrastructure, parks and recreation, among many others. It is expected that the study will take 15-24 months, he said, though leaders hope that it will be on the shorter end of that time frame.

To complete the study, Montgomery will be partnering with planning NEXT, a company based in Columbus, Ohio that helps communities develop strategies, said Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange.

Strange said officials ultimately chose planning NEXT after consulting with multiple companies because it had previously worked in Mobile and received a strong recommendation from Mayor Sandy Stimpson.



Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange and Alabama Commissioner of Mental Health Lynn Beshear talk about Envision 2050 in Montgomery, AL on Dec. 7, 2017. (Photo: Brian Edwards / Advertiser)

The shift away from a community oriented board to a government body came after longtime Envision 2020 leader Lynn Beshear left to become commissioner of the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Beshear was chosen for the state position because of her strong focus on mental health in the region. Strange reaffirmed the city's commitment to mental health with Beshear's departure, saying that leaders will help push through the changes that she is working on statewide.

Thursday's event served as a farewell of sorts, as Beshear personally thanked many of the people involved in the project throughout the years, tearing up early in her speech.

She said the project was created under Mayor Bobby Bright to jumpstart areas of the city that were in a rut.

"It brought hope and optimism," Beshear said, adding that joining the group ended up being an enduring commitment, even though the members may not have realized it at first.

"This is not a typical board of a nonprofit," she said. "Once you are on, it's sort of a lifetime thing."

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