The City of Tuskegee proper covers approximately 16.0 square miles and includes a population of approximately 10,000 residents. The City of Tuskegee is composed of land parcels with land uses dominated by single family residential, but also including local commercial, religious, educational, and agricultural.

The East Campus of the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (NRHP listed, 2012)/Tuskegee Veterans Administration Medical Center (TVAMC) is composed of more than thirty buildings located on more than three hundred acres of land immediately north of Tuskegee University. The TVAMC represents a major chapter in the national efforts of Black Americans to secure adequate health care. The context for the TVAMC is the collective national struggle that also links to other historic Black towns such as Mound Bayou, Mississippi and Black institutions such as Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. The sociocultural aspects of this story have been previously underrepresented in relation to Black communities and place.

The significance of Tuskegee Institute itself, the Dr. George Washington Carver Museum, and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site are well known. However, the residents and administrators who followed Dr. Booker T. Washington became regional, national, and international leaders in movements for improvement in Black health care and agriculture.

An extended range of resources and contexts that were critical in the origins and evolution of historic settlement and evolution of the City of Tuskegee must be documented. The role of land ownership, entrepreneurship, and agriculture, including sustainable rituals, traditions and customs complement historic architectural significance and interpretation. The significance of vernacular landscape, cultural landscapes, and vernacular architecture in historic Black towns and settlements must be presented in detail. The roles of historic material culture (folk art, sewing, carpentry, metal work, etc.) must be researched and added to the interpretation of the legacies of the city’s residents. The humanities disciplines (history, literature, religious studies, etc.) will be a major contributor.
Request for Assistance
The City of Tuskegee requests assistance with the following initiatives:

1. Community Genealogy
The City of Tuskegee was chartered in 1843. The town has the names of the incorporators. Many of these pioneers owned Black slaves who eventually played major roles in the community evolution following emancipation in 1865. Many descendants of the freedmen still reside in Tuskegee. Oral history, church records, veterans records, and detailed census research will play an important role in this phase of the project. The town needs in-depth genealogical research on all of the community pioneers in order to reconstruct its human and physical history and prepare programs and exhibits for education and cultural tourism. The results of this research will also be used to provide content for the town website and interpretation of physical resources that may be considered for historic landmark designation.

2. Cemetery research, documentation and interpretation
Numerous early residents and descendants of the town leaders are buried in the Tuskegee area cemeteries. The second step in the genealogy process will be to cross-reference cemetery rosters and genealogies of those buried in the cemeteries with the list of town civic and business leaders. The data needs to be digitized for permanent recording and ready access. The results of this research will also be used to provide content for the town website and interpretation of physical resources that may be considered for historic landmark designation.

3. National Register of Historic Places (NR)
As a step toward protecting the community, the City of Tuskegee would like to be nominated and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The Town needs assistance with the necessary historic research and interpretation to meet Federal Secretary of the Interior Standards and Alabama Historical Commission criteria. Most of the original town plat is extant within the current town limits of Tuskegee, only a relatively small portion of the town site is included in any local, state or NR historic district.
3. National Register of Historic Places (NR), continued

Including the original 1843 town plat area in a NR district would document and interpret the important cultural legacies. This would also expand the knowledge and understanding of the variety of resources that are fundamental parts of Tuskegee’s, and America’s heritage.

Using the NR process to secure National Historic Site status for our VA Hospital, which was created in 1923, for the treatment of Negro veterans, and to be run by Negro administrators, doctors, nurses and other medical staff is a priority. It was created by an effort initiated and carried through, by the 2nd Principal of now Tuskegee University, Dr. Robert Russa Moton, and Dr. John Kenney who was then Director of the John A. Andrew Hospital, which was then a part of Tuskegee Institute. There was tremendously serious opposition from the white population in Tuskegee, and throughout the state of Alabama, to the hospital being staffed by Negroes. The Ku Klux Klan even marched past the Tuskegee campus, and on the VA Hospital grounds in protest, but Dr. Moton, worked together with President Harding until the goal of having an all Black staff at the VA was realized. The VA was at one time the 3rd largest Veterans Hospital in the US, and it, and Tuskegee Institute, were for over 60 years, the economic engines of the Tuskegee community, Black and white. The significance of community support and sacrifice for the VA facility (staff, patients, and patient families) must be documented and interpreted.

Tuskegee’s second priority is to have Tuskegee acknowledged as the birthplace of Mrs. Rosa Parks, and to identify the site of her actual “home house”, and have it appropriately marked, and placed on the State and on the National Historic Register.
4. Historic records, documents and artifacts curation and archival preservation

Documents and artifacts are being gathered by the Tuskegee History Center, but systematic assistance with cataloging and digital recording is necessary to produce permanent archival storage. In addition, original town records and documents need to be digitized, restored and permanently housed. All of the documents in the City archives need to be catalogued, conserved and digitized. Several town residents have private collections that need to be catalogued, conserved and digitized.

5. Youth engagement

Several Tuskegee organizations and churches that have ongoing youth programs are interested in participating in the historic preservation activities described above. Tuskegee and area youth would participate in a series of training, learning activities and cultural tourism programs that significantly expand and explain the relationships between place (land, landscape, structures, sustainable environment), the civic virtues that formed the base of 19th and early twentieth century Black communities across America will be planned and produced.

6. Cultural tourism

A Tuskegee priority is to support the Tuskegee Repertory Theatre, Inc. (which the City of Tuskegee has officially declared, “Tuskegee’s City Theatre”) in its effort to become a Mecca for Black Historical Drama, and thereby provide an additional tourist experience, for the many tourists from around the world, who visit Tuskegee’s two National Historic Sites: Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, and in so doing provide an important source of tourist revenue for the Tuskegee community economy.

Timetable(s)

The Town would like to produce a series of exhibits that could be displayed for its 2015 commemoration activities during the 100th year of the passing of Dr. Booker T. Washington and the annual Dr. George Washington Carver Commemorative Festival (May) activities. The planning and preparation of the exhibits can be used as educational training for the youth and community at large.