

2023

DOWNTOWN
DEVELOPMENT
DISTRICT



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Photo: Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge's Ebb and Flow art installation.

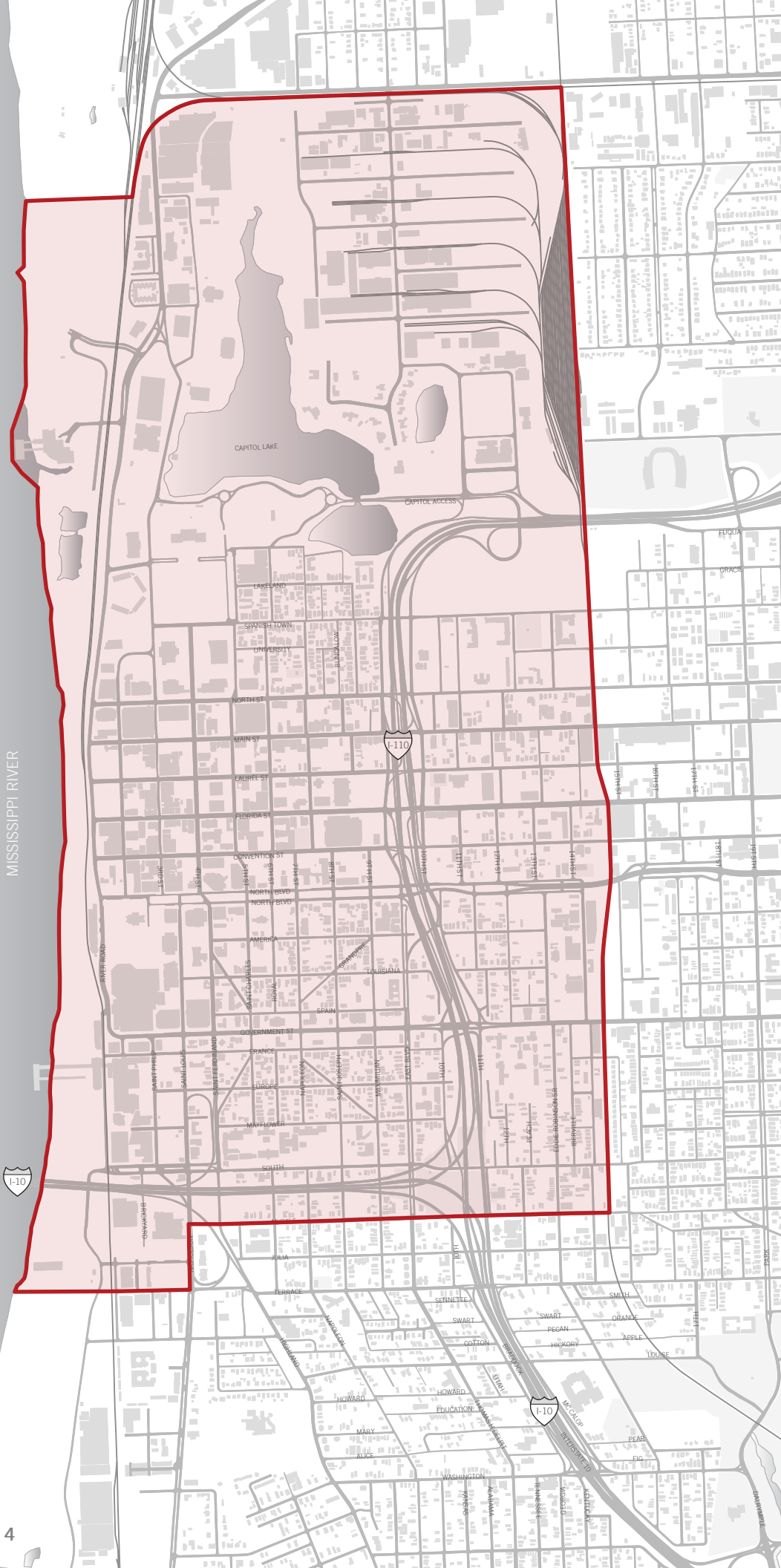
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

DEVELOPMENT YEARBOOK
2023

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DDD BOUNDARY

West boundary at the Mississippi River immediately south of the Old Municipal Dock site, east to River Road, east to Terrace Avenue, east to Nicholson Drive, north to Myrtle Avenue, east to Kansas City Line Railroad (eastern boundary), north along railroad to Choctaw Drive, west along railroad, following southern curve of railroad near River Road, south on railroad, west to river at Eiland Street (north boundary of River Park development site), south along Mississippi River back to southern edge of Old Municipal Dock site.



INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Development District works to initiate, incubate, and support partnerships that develop and enhance the district, using community-driven master plans and economic incentives to aid private-sector and nonprofit philanthropic organization in their development and entrepreneurship efforts. These partnerships are key to continuing the momentum and excitement we have for the future of Downtown.

In 2023, we completed a 5-year strategic plan under the leadership of the new Executive Director, Whitney Hoffman Sayal, AICP. It will guide the priorities of the office and the formation of new and continued partnerships with a shared interest in downtown. We also released our 2023 Downtown Development Toolkit, highlighting downtown’s positive trends and data including the rise in residential, as well as high occupancy rates in both office and hotels.

The 2023 Yearbook features developments over the past year, provides a snapshot of data and statistics, highlights projects in the pipeline, and features a list of acknowledgments and recognition. In addition, this document showcases the Downtown Development District’s projects, events, and initiatives driving the next phase of development.



AT A GLANCE:

STATS SUMMARY FOR 2023

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT



92%

CBD RESIDENTIAL
OCCUPANCY

HOTELS



71%

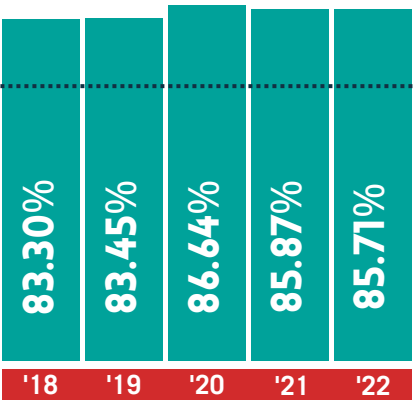
OCCUPANCY RATE

\$117 MILLION

HOTEL INVESTMENT
SINCE 2010

OFFICE OCCUPANCY

2022 Parish
Average
72.43%



CLASS A/B/C OCCUPANCY
Occupancy rate per percentage

Downtown's 2022 Occupancy rate of **85.71%**
compared to the 2022 Parish Occupancy rate
percentage of **72.43%**.

SOCIAL MEDIA



FACEBOOK

117k Impressions

7.6k Likes

61k Reach



INSTAGRAM

42k Impressions

2.7k Followers

27k Reach

PUBLIC SAFETY



Less than 2% - Downtown Calls

98% - EBR Parish

Less than 2% of BRPD calls in EBR Parish are made to
5th District.



24-HOUR POLICE PRESENCE

This year 5th District BRPD began a 24-hour
police presence in Downtown.



2023 PROJECTS



THE QUEEN BATON ROUGE

Recent state legislation has allowed riverboat casinos to operate landside and the former Hollywood Casino was the first casino downtown to begin its renovation. The casino was rebranded as The Queen Baton Rouge once the renovation was completed in the fall of 2023. Approximately \$85 million was invested to expand the existing pavilion to include an additional 42,000 square feet - totaling over 100,000 square feet.

The Queen BR offers dining, gaming, and entertainment in the northern region of the Downtown Development District. The newly renovated space features 700 gaming machines, 18 gaming tables, and a variety of other electric tables. In addition, the casino has four restaurants, state of the art DraftKings Sportsbook space with 20 betting kiosks, and flexible meeting and event space overlooking the Mississippi River.



THE BELLE BATON ROUGE

In addition to the Queen Baton Rouge, The Belle of Baton Rouge also received approval to move the casino land-side from the riverboat. The first phase of the \$100 million renovations will include renovating the full hotel to have 250 rooms and 44 suites. The Belle will move its casino operations into the Atrium with 600 slot machines, 14 gaming tables, and a sportsbook. The casino will also open a café, oyster bar, bistro pizza, and a small bowling area. The entire project is expected to be completed by the end of 2024.



LINCOLN THEATRE

The historic Lincoln Theatre, owned by the Louisiana Black History Hall of Fame, opened in 1949 as one of three major theaters in Baton Rouge – serving as a community attraction and welcoming performances by famous musicians and featured films. Unfortunately, it was closed in the 1980s, but several recent revitalization efforts have been made on the historic sign, seating, electrical systems, windows, and other vital elements. Franklin Lassiter, project architect, has completed plans that include additions to the theatre, lobby, gallery space, and other amenities. Construction, funded by the city-parish and state, is expected to begin soon with an estimated construction timeline of 11 months.



RIVERMARK CENTRE

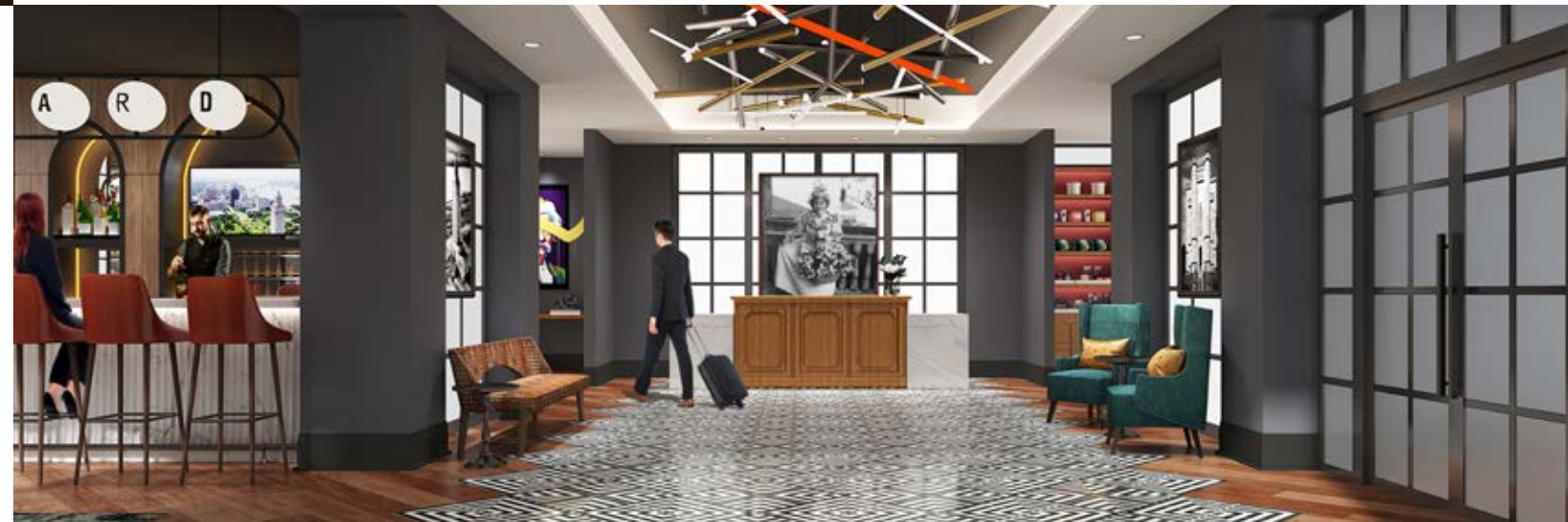
Wampold Companies completed the renovation of the two former Chase Towers in the fall of 2023. The buildings are located in the heart of the Central Business District and were originally built in the 1960s. Rivermark I, the southern building, converted former office space to a 21-story mixed-use development with luxury residential 1, 2, and 3-bedroom units. Rivermark II, the northern building, remains office space and was also recently renovated. It welcomed HNTB, a renowned engineering/planning firm, to downtown earlier in 2023.

The Rivermark Center's two buildings are immediately recognizable on the downtown skyline and feature unique amenities and culture in the heart of the city. Rivermark I offers its residents community amenities such as a rooftop pool, green space, pet park, and a resident parking garage. Rivermark II offers its businesses updated office space with views of the skyline located within center of commerce. The development also includes a full-service Chase Bank and restaurant/retail space on the ground level.



HERON II

Key Real Estate and John O. Hearin partnered to bring the Heron to downtown a few years ago at 625 Convention Street and recently announced their intention to construct an additional residential development in a property adjacent to the existing building and the Downtown Greenway. The development is in the design phase and is considering between 200-250 residential units as well as a potential retail component. The design concept is intended to attract young professionals working downtown as well as area older university students. The existing building on the development site is currently being demolished and construction on the new facility is expected to begin in 2024.



HOTEL INDIGO RENOVATIONS

The Hotel Indigo is one of the first hotels redeveloped in downtown and is located in the heart of the district. The first major renovation began with a budget of \$25 million in 2009 and offered 48,000 sq ft and 93 rooms. For over a decade, the pet-friendly boutique hotel has welcomed thousands of visitors. In 2023, the hotel announced another renovation to overhaul all of the hotel rooms and space into a unique style that showcases southern hospitality in the Red Stick. The renovations are projected to cost approximately 10 million and the completion date is estimated in the third quarter of 2024.



ORIGIN HOTEL

The Origin Hotel, formerly known as the Holiday Inn Express, is located on the corner of St. Ferdinand and North Boulevard. The building is finishing renovations by Thrash Development into a boutique hotel, offering a unique experience to guests and patrons. The original building was built in 1956 and was home to the Baton Rouge Savings and Loan Bank. Following the bank, a charter school was also housed in the facility before its major renovation in 2015 into the Holiday Inn Express.

There are five Origin Hotels in the US located in North Carolina, Kentucky, Texas, and two in Colorado. The Baton Rouge location includes an additional floor to the hotel, offering rooftop seating, additional penthouse suites, and a full-service restaurant and bar. The \$10 million renovation began in 2023 and construction is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2024.



MANSHIP THEATRE RENOVATIONS

In 2023, Manship Theatre updated the carpet and seating in the main stage area. Louisiana School Equipment facilitated the project, with the chairs designed and built by Michigan-based Irwin Seating. The new carpet was custom made from a selection of submitted designs by local multimedia artists, and manufactured in Gworgio by Engineered Floors. The new chairs feature cupholders, taller backs, and increased the main stage's capacity to 330. The chairs are also part of a capital campaign where individuals, families, or businesses can sponsor a seat and be acknowledged with an engraved plaque.



LASM DOME LIGHTING

The Louisiana Art and Science Museum kicked off its 20th anniversary this year with a fundraising campaign to light the exterior of the planetarium dome. The lighting was officially celebrated at their annual gathering themed Out of this World with a Dinner Under the Stars series. The new lighting highlights the dome and creates a unique feature on the riverfront and in the heart of downtown.



ADA IMPROVEMENTS

Several projects focused on improving accessibility downtown are proposed as part of the MOVEBR program, including ADA Improvements in locations near the planned Bus Rapid Transit project. In 2023, improvements were made focused around Florida Street and Convention Street and included ADA accessible curb ramps, pedestrian signals with audio, crosswalks, and other necessary upgrades. More ADA improvement related projects are expected downtown as part of the MOVEBR and Bus Rapid Transit projects.

LOUISIANA CONNECTOR

Construction is complete on the Downtown Greenway Louisiana Connector, connecting the Government Street Bike Lanes to the Downtown Greenway at T.J. Jemison Boulevard. The Downtown Greenway project is spearheaded by the Downtown Development District and is a 2.75-mile interconnected network of bike/pedestrian pathways connecting Baton Rouge's public parks and recreational facilities, inner city communities, and cultural attractions through the use of greenways, or linear parks. 1.75 miles have been completed.

The first phase of the project focused on the portion under I-110, showcasing new signage and ADA and bicycle access; completed in the fall of 2023. The second phase of the project will include sidewalks, bicycle sharrows, ADA compliant crosswalk improvements, wayfinding signage, and streetscape amenities along Eddie Robinson Sr. Drive and Louisiana Avenue. It is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2024. Grant funding for phase one is from the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and phase two from the Safe Routes to Public Places Program.

Photo Credit: Mark Martin



BRAAM MURAL

The Baton Rouge African American museum moved locations this year to 805 Saint Louis Street, in the former City-Parish Recycling Office Building. The original artifacts of the museum were brought to the new facility this summer as part of their annual Juneteenth Celebration. The building exterior was upgraded with murals spearheaded and coordinated by the Walls Project. The mural was designed by two local artists, Wayne Dane Jones and Antoine Mitchell, in conjunction with Southern University Lab art students and was completed in the 4th quarter of 2023.

BUSINESSES



BUSINESS HIGHLIGHTS

The following list is a snapshot of businesses opening downtown in 2023, but is not inclusive of all business openings.

BELLI, 701 SPANISH TOWN ROAD. Belli is a small grocery store and restaurant located in the heart of Spanish Town. The business is dedicated to fostering a vibrant sense of belonging and community through their wholesome food offerings.

CHARLES W. LAMAR JR. YMCA 24-HOURS, 521 NORTH THIRD STREET. Located in the LaSalle Parking Garage, the Charles W. Lamar Jr. YMCA has been serving downtown patrons for year, and added a 24-hour option in 2023.

DARK 30, 151 THIRD STREET. Dark 30 is a new downtown bar serving customers a selection of wines, cocktails, and zero-proof drinks while supporting local businesses and artists. It is located on the first block of Third Street and across from the Watermark Hotel.

EMERGENT METHOD, 200 LAUREL STREET. Baton Rouge-based Emergent Method expanded its downtown headquarters at the corner of Laurel and Lafayette Street. The business has grown its staff and now occupies the first and second floor of the building.

HNTB, II RIVERMARK CENTRE 450 LAUREL STREET. HNTB, a national engineering firm completed its move to the II Rivermark Centre office building in early 2023. The company includes approximately 50 employees and is occupying 9,200 square feet of space on the 12th floor.

LEGACY LOBBY, 340 FLORIDA STREET. Located in the old Varsity Shop building, the building has been updated to highlight its historical elegance and contemporary flair. The venue is available for events and social gatherings.

MOTHER'S LOUNGE, 143 THIRD STREET. Located on the first block of Third Street and near Town Square, Mother's offers a unique experience and social scene. The venue also offers an array of drinks and food options to their patrons.

PLACID REFINING, 121 CONVENTION STREET. The beginning of 2023 welcomed a new company to the heart of downtown. Placid Refining, based out of Port Allen, bought an office building and parking lot on the corner of Fourth Street and Laurel Street for \$4.8 million. The newly renovated building houses approximately 50 of the company's non-operations staff.

SOMEWHERE NEIGHBORHOOD BAR, 450 LAUREL STREET. Previously home to Boudreaux and Thibodeaux's, the space is currently being remodeled and once open, will feature a handcrafted cocktail bar as well as a menu featuring appetizers, sandwiches, and sweets.

TOWN SQUARE PIZZA, 321 NORTH BLVD. A new pizzeria opened in 2023 directly across from North Boulevard Town Square. The new venue features regular and gluten free pizza, as well as ready-made salads.

30,384 jobs
within the DDD

671 businesses



PROJECTS IN PLANNING



CAPITOL LAKES CLEAN-UP

In 2023, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officially added the Capitol Lakes to its Superfund National Priority List, prioritizing the lake system for pollutant clean-up. A fishing advisory has long been in place for the lakes, with signs posted along the shorelines - as it has been known to contain polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and other toxic material. Next steps will include a remedial investigation to determine the extent of contamination and then determine possible clean-up methods. As the Capitol Lakes are an asset of the downtown area, this project offers an opportunity to not only remove toxic material, but also capitalize on its potential.



ATCHAFALAYA GRANT

The Downtown Development District acquired a grant from the Atchafalaya Trace Commission is to create and install educational signage along the riverfront. The interpretive signage panels will give information on the water systems within the region that visitors, particularly riverboat visitors, may not otherwise be exposed to. The grant is a matching funds grant, providing up to \$12,500 for the signage. The DDD hired CARBO Landscape Architecture to develop the informational graphic layouts and the construction details for the signage structures. The signage is expected to be installed in 2024.



MAIN STREET MARKET RENOVATIONS

Downtown’s public marketplace located at 501 Main Street is the home of Saturday’s Red Stick Farmers Market and weekday food vendors. BREADA - Big River Economic Agricultural Development Alliance - manages the market, supports local farmers, and promotes community access to fresh foods. In 2023, renovations to the Main Street Market began with a \$1 million allocation from the state. The newly renovated facility will reopen in 2024 with expanded restrooms, updated fixtures, and a programming space to better serve the downtown community.



RIVERFRONT STUDY

The LSU School of Robert Reich Landscape Architecture 5th year students studied the Downtown Baton Rouge riverfront as part of the fall semester studio project. The class was divided into three groups and divided the length of the riverfront into three different sections. They began by studying the downtown master plans and reviewing the recommendations of the plans, incorporating the concepts into their plans. The final plans focused on improving accessibility to the riverfront, creating social gathering spaces, and incorporating modern design concepts.



THE VALLEY HOUSE

Anthony Kimble, a local investor in Downtown East & Spanish Town, has purchased property on Government Street. Kimble purchased property at 1440 Government Street with plans to include a book store, coffee shop, event space, and a bar/lounge area, redefining the building into a concept known as The Valley House. Mr. Kimble has acquired another nearby property on Julia Street that is planned for multi-family housing developments. Plans are to develop 12 to 14 multifamily housing units on the Julia Street site, covering three lots. Construction dates for the Julia Street site are to be determined.



FLORIDA CORRIDOR MASTER PLAN

Build Baton Rouge is leading a master planning effort focused on the Florida Boulevard Corridor from River Road to the East Baton Rouge Parish eastern boundary, engaging Perkins + Will – a renowned planning firm. The purpose of the plan is to provide a clear guide for economic development projects within the district, while leveraging concurrent investments in infrastructure along and adjacent to the Florida Corridor. The master plan will address transportation, land use, urban design, and community development through a lens of equitable investment. Following a robust public engagement campaign, the design team identified several focus areas, including one located in downtown under Interstate 110. The planning process is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2024.



LINCOLN HOTEL

The historic Lincoln Hotel, which hosted African-American guests in Baton Rouge during the period of segregation in the south, was purchased by developer Anthony Kimble. Famous African-American musicians including Nat King Cole, James Brown, and Aretha Franklin stayed at the hotel in its heyday. The 12,000 square-foot building has been abandoned since the 1980s, but the developer plans to convert the building into 12 apartments and two retail spaces. The building was placed on the National Historic Register in 2018, qualifying it for state and federal historic building tax credits to help finance the redevelopment. Construction is expected to begin in 2024.



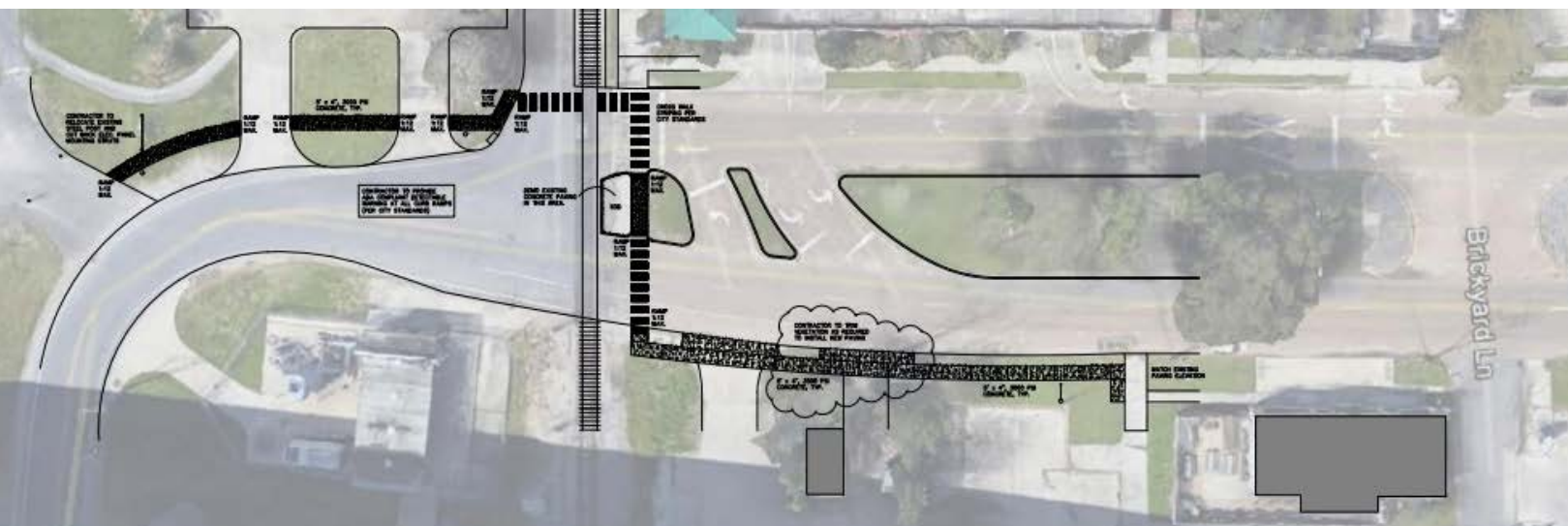
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DOWNTOWN GREENWAY NORTH

The Downtown Development District and other City-Parish representatives are working to incorporate bicycle lanes connecting the Downtown Greenway at North Blvd. north to Capitol Park and Spanish Town. The DDD Strategic Plan recommends completing a transportation plan that integrates the transportation recommendations from other planning initiatives, including the EBR City-Parish Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan and Plan Baton Rouge II, to identify the most feasible and desirable connection. The final recommendation will further the development of the Downtown Greenway, connecting Spanish Town and Central Business District residents to the core of downtown and the riverfront.



SOUTH BOULEVARD ENHANCEMENTS

In early 2023, the Metropolitan Council approved the South Boulevard Trailhead Connection project to receive MOVEBR Community Enhancement Funds. The DDD envisioned the project to better connect pedestrian and bicyclists to the Mississippi River Levee Trail and the existing South Boulevard Trailhead. The enhancements will include crosswalks, wayfinding, ADA ramps, and sidewalks that connect the trailhead to nearby parking and walking facilities. The project is currently in the planning and design phase and was awarded to Regis Infrastructure Group.



BUS RAPID TRANSIT

A Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) was awarded \$15 million in federal grant funding through the Better Utilizing Infrastructure to Leverage Development (BUILD) program. The 9-mile BRT corridor will provide a new transit route connecting educational institutions, the Water Campus, the Downtown Central Business District, medical facilities, commercial businesses and residential neighborhoods along Plank Road, Florida Street and Nicholson Drive. The \$53.6 million BRT project will be funded through federal grants, DOTD, CATS, and the MOVEBR program.



I-110 LIGHTING GATEWAY

WHLC Architecture completed conceptual plans to improve the existing, 500 free parking spaces under I-110. Currently, these parking areas are underutilized, and the DDD plans to install security lighting and wayfinding to make them safer and more accessible. The improved parking areas will provide a safe, convenient, and free parking option for downtown workers and visitors. Additional decorative lighting is planned for the gateway areas entering downtown. The development of final plans for the first phase of the project is expected to begin in 2024.



NOLA/BR PASSENGER RAIL

Canadian Pacific Railway is committed to the establishment of passenger service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, with large public support and demand. A passenger train has not run between Baton Rouge and New Orleans since 1969. The proposed line would include stops in Baton Rouge (one in Downtown), Gonzales, LaPlace, and at Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, with a terminus at the Union Passenger Terminal in New Orleans. In 2023, Governor John Bel Edwards’s office announced his signature on an agreement that included Amtrak’s participation.



RIVER ROAD WEST

The project continues the existing River Road 10’ multi-use path ending at the Hollywood Casino entrance to two residential complexes north. Portions of the path will be 10’ but it will transition to a 5’ walking trail due to the limited right of way and utility locations, before terminating at the entrance to the Riverview Condominiums. This will provide residents with a safe way to bike or walk to the Mississippi Levee access and Central Business District. Bonton and Associates have been contracted to complete the construction plans for the project. The plans are expected to be complete in the first quarter of 2024 and construction is estimated to begin at the end of 2024.



RIVER ROAD EAST

A pedestrian path on the east side of River Road between Florida Street and the State Office Buildings to the north has been planned and integrated with the recently installed streetscape adjacent to the IBM complex. These improvements include street trees, sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian signals. The project is funded through the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development Transportation Alternatives Program. Plans are in the final stages and construction is expected to begin in 2024.



THE WATER CAMPUS

The Water Campus is a 35- acre world-class research center where scientists and engineers develop new concepts to protect our wetlands and save our coastlines. The Water Campus is currently home to the Coastal Protection & Restoration Authority, the agency in charge of implementing the coastal master plan, and the LSU Center for River Studies. The Center for Coastal & Deltaic Solutions sits on the city’s old municipal dock and is home to the Water Institute of The Gulf, The Estuary, a 6,000 square foot Conference & Event Venue and the LSU Coastal Sustainability Studio. More than \$100 million has been spent on the first phase of the campus. As it continues to grow, the campus will continue to bring the greatest minds in science and engineering to strengthen efforts to restore and enhance coastal environments in Louisiana, around the country and internationally.



RIVER CENTER UPGRADES / STUDY

In 2023, the Raising Cane's River Center, a comprehensive facelift has been undertaken, encompassing a facility-wide deep cleaning for an enhanced visitor experience. Noteworthy improvements include upgraded locker rooms for added comfort, vibrant LED digital signage throughout the venue, and a plush ballroom carpet that adds a touch of sophistication.

The crowning jewel of the enhancements is the installation of a state-of-the-art LED scoreboard, providing patrons with an immersive and cutting-edge viewing experience, solidifying the River Center's commitment to modernizing its facilities for the benefit of both performers and audiences alike. In 2023, the Raising Cane's River Center also proudly introduced the Baton Rouge Zydeco hockey team, bringing an exciting new chapter of sports entertainment to downtown. Meanwhile, the River Center Arena hosted sensational music performances, including memorable shows by acclaimed artists like Lauren Daigle and Parker McCollum.



DDD PROJECTS & INITIATIVES



DDD STRATEGIC PLAN

The Downtown Development District relies on community-driven master plans to lead the development of Downtown Baton Rouge and strategic plans to outline the office's activities and initiatives. Master plans are dynamic long-term planning documents that provide a conceptual layout to guide future growth and development. Examples include Plan Baton Rouge II (2009) and the Riverfront Master Plan (2006). Strategic plans define an organization's specific strategies, goals, and actions. The DDD hired LaFargue Consulting to lead the planning effort and in the fall of 2023, and released its new 5-Year Strategic Plan. The plan was developed from a robust public engagement campaign garnering more than 1,400 survey responses and several committee and stakeholder meetings.

The resulting strategic plan reflects the immense amount of feedback received and was organized into four main pillars: 1) Organizational Sustainability and Responsible Governance, Building Up the Core: Planning, Projects, and Infrastructure, 3) Improving the Downtown Experience for All Members of our Community, and 4) Enhancing Communications for Transparency, Brand, Building, and Progress. The plan will guide the DDD efforts to progress us to the next level – attracting new businesses, welcoming new residents, and market our unique downtown experience to visitors.

DOWNTOWN MASTER PLANS

The Downtown Development District (DDD) launched many planning initiatives during the first 15 years of its existence, setting a tone for redevelopment that is evident throughout Downtown Baton Rouge today. The Baton Rouge 2000 plan was initiated in 1983 and established not only a blueprint for downtown development, but also created the DDD to oversee implementation of the plan. The Capitol Park Master Plan guided the redevelopment of the area around the State Capitol and the consolidation of state offices. Several other plans were developed to further downtown's progress, including the Riverfront Development Plan, Wayfinding Plan, Riverfront Master Plan, and Plan Baton Rouge II.

Plan Baton Rouge II, created in 2009, has been guiding the DDD's efforts over the past several years - with many of the recommended projects completed. It builds upon the original Plan Baton Rouge with the overarching goal of making downtown a more vibrant place to live, work, shop, dine, learn, and play. The plan contains three major objectives to Green, Activate, and Connect Downtown. Since Plan Baton Rouge II's creation, the DDD has focused efforts on strategies to achieve these objectives and we have seen much success in our city's core as a result. Several components of the Central Green and the Downtown Greenway have been completed, multi-use buildings and residential opportunities have developed, additional office space and businesses have opened, riverfront accessibility has improved with new amenities added, and multiple hotels have been completed. The new DDD Strategic Plan recommends continuing to identify projects that activate downtown and also pursuing funds and partnerships to begin a new downtown/urban core master planning effort.



THE CENTRAL GREEN

Over several years, DDD has worked to connect numerous civic and cultural institutions near the River Center and City Hall campuses through a unified system of greenspaces known collectively as the Central Green. In total, the Central Green boasts over 11 acres of accessible, contiguous public greenspace. The Central Green has become a premier regional destination, hosting hundreds of annual events on the lush greenspaces, ranging from large concert series that attract thousands of attendees to small informal gatherings.

The realization of the Central Green began as a primary recommendation of the community-driven master plan, Plan Baton Rouge II. The planning team recommended removing barriers, prioritizing accessibility, increasing tree canopy and permeable surfaces, and creating a series of outdoor “living rooms” surrounded by a variety of cultural destinations. The subsequent implementation of the plan focused on removing concrete, changing surrounding road systems to accommodate pedestrians and bicycles, and replacing hardscape surfaces with expansive green spaces. North Boulevard Town Square, Repentance Park, Davis S. Rhorer Plaza, and Riverfront Plaza are all components of the Central Green. Davis S. Rhorer Plaza was named after the DDD’s founding Executive Director in 2021. The Central Green has become the unifying connective tissue linking our civic and cultural attractions together. The International Downtown Association awarded the Central Green: Connecting Community with Commerce & Culture the 2020 Award of Excellence.



RIVERFRONT

The Downtown Riverfront is a primary feature of Baton Rouge and features the Mississippi River Levee Path, Riverfront Plaza, the Levee Green, Sing the River sculpture, and more. Several investments have been made over the years to strengthen the river as a regional destination for visitors and additional investments are on the horizon. Recently, the pedestrian bridge spanning over River Road has been stabilized and Riverfront Plaza's landscaping, water features, and lighting have been enhanced. The Baton Rouge Rotary Club also located their centennial sculpture piece known as Sing the River on the riverfront at Florida Street. River Road enhancements including multi-use paths and landscaping have been completed north to the Queen BR casino, with plans for further northern expansion to the residential developments, The Hive and Riverview.

Public Input received from the 2023 Downtown strategic planning process revealed the public's interest in additional social gathering space, often focused on the riverfront. Also in 2023, the LSU School of Robert Landscape Architecture 5th year class focused on redesigning the riverfront, offering ideas to begin reimagining how the space can be enhanced to become more of a regional destination. This reinvigorated focus on the riverfront has prioritized the area for additional planning and infrastructure enhancements.



DOWNTOWN GREENWAY

The Downtown Greenway is a pedestrian and bicycling corridor that links residential neighborhoods to downtown parks, businesses, and cultural attractions utilizing the existing BREC parks, interstate infrastructure, and public rights-of-way. The creation of the greenway has spurred new investments and redevelopment in the city's core. Planning for the Downtown Greenway was made possible by funding from the EPA's Greening America's Capitals program and Capital Area Finance Authority. An additional \$3 million in grant funding was secured to design and build early phases. Design Workshop completed the design for North Boulevard and East/T.J. Jemison Boulevard.

In total, more than 1.75 miles of the Downtown Greenway have been completed. Construction was completed on the first components of the Downtown Greenway in 2015 at BREC's Expressway Park and the Myrtle Street Connector to the Lincoln Theatre. The North Boulevard section was completed in 2016 and features separated bicycle and pedestrian paths, median crossings, specialty pavement, curb ramps, seating areas, lighting, sculpture, water fountains, bicycle racks, and lush landscaping. This section connects to North Boulevard Town Square and the Mississippi River Levee path. Construction on the T.J. Jemison / East Boulevard portion of the Downtown Greenway was completed in the beginning of 2020 and includes bicycle and pedestrian paths, lighting, and landscaping. In 2023, the greenway was connected to the nearby Government Street bike lanes via the Louisiana Connector, also spearheaded by the DDD. The DDD and the City-Parish are in the planning process of identifying possible additional on-street bicycle infrastructure.



WAYFINDING UPDATES

In 2006, the DDD announced the Downtown Wayfinding Plan, establishing a sense of place and continuity to the downtown area while making it easily navigable in an aesthetically pleasing manner. The plan was completed by Sasaki Associates and WHLC Architecture and was awarded by the International Downtown Association. The resulting signage has guided visitors to our cultural assets and visitor amenities for almost two decades and includes vehicular directional, pedestrian directional, public parking, street signs, trolley/bus stop signs, historic identity, and large visitor kiosks.

Although the signs still serve the purpose of guiding our visitors, they are in need of general maintenance and repair. The Downtown Development District requested \$50,000 from the 2023 budget supplement to update the content of the signs as well as revitalize the signage materials and structures. The restoration planning process began in 2023 and is expected to continue into 2024 – conducting a general inventory, identifying needed updates, and generating cost estimates. The restoration process is expected to continue in 2024.

LANDSCAPE & MAINTENANCE

The Downtown Development District works with the City-Parish Maintenance Department as well as the Building and Grounds Department to maintain and enhance the greenspaces in downtown. Many of the spaces have contracts with private companies to ensure their proper care. The Central Green, Riverfront Plaza, and the Downtown Greenway along North/T.J.Jemison/East Boulevard, are under these maintenance contracts. The Central Green is utilized for large events as well as daily activities, requiring maintenance methods that keep the grass lush and green.

In addition to downtown’s greenspaces, the Downtown Development District began an initiative to inventory and assess the Central Business District’s Street trees. \$50,000 from the 2023 City-Parish Budget Supplement has been allocated to address any needed replacement of trees that have been extensively damaged or in poor condition. The DDD is finalizing the inventory in partnership with Baton Rouge Green and the City-Parish GIS Department and has plans to begin replacing tree wells identified in need.



STOREFRONT INITIATIVE

The Downtown Development District has engaged the Baton Rouge Area Chamber to assist with recruiting businesses to downtown's core. The project includes conducting an inventory and assessment of underutilized storefront space, communicating with area real estate agents and property owners to identify any impediments to returning the spaces to commerce, and identifying possible tenants to lease the space – with a focused effort on identifying minority owned businesses to participate.

In 2023, the two organizations finished the inventory component of the project and are finalizing the business prospect list. Plans for 2024 include conducting roundtable discussions with real estate and property owners, finalizing marketing materials to utilize when communicating with business prospects, and recruiting businesses to the spaces. The project is expected to be completed in 2024 and is an exciting example of leveraging partnerships to better our community.



THIRD STREET IMPROVEMENTS

Once considered the spine of the city with its bustling businesses, Third Street fell into decline in the 70s and 80s. Over the past few decades, it is reemerging as one of the most vibrant streets featuring a diverse group of businesses. These businesses include a full-service grocery store, residential developments, arts centers, restaurants, live music venues, a police station, and more. Located in the heart of downtown, Third Street is a destination full of cultural and architectural significance, and our stakeholders have recognized its significance.

As part of the 2023 5-year strategic plan, Third Street is recognized as an asset that offers a variety of attractions and businesses, but is in need of streetscape improvements. The DDD and Visit Baton Rouge entered into a partnership to fund the installation and maintenance of several plant pots along the corridor in the summer of 2023. The DDD then requested City-Parish Budget Supplement funds, that were approved, to begin the master planning process and a built prototype. The planning process has begun in 2023 and is expected to be completed in 2024, with construction beginning on an identified project recommendation from the master plan.



MARKETING & ATTRACTION

In order to most effectively market the complete Downtown Baton Rouge experience to visitors, residents, and workers, the DDD website focuses on making information more easily accessible to different users with subject contents. These subject contents include: Discover Downtown, Live Here, Do Business, and Get Around. In 2023, the DDD also reinvigorated and prioritized communication through its email blasts and social media pages, substantially increasing our presence and interaction with the public.

In addition to the website, emails, and social media, the Downtown Development District creates an annual Development Yearbook (this document) and a Development Toolkit to provide developers and investors key market data and statistics about the downtown area and activities. The toolkit outlines numerous permitting processes, provides important contact information, and gives a snapshot into current downtown demographics. All available local and state economic incentives are also outlined within the document that is available on our website and in our complete marketing packets.



Photo Credit: Visit Baton Rouge



COMMUNITY EVENTS

Downtown residents and guests enjoy over 1,500 annual events including parades, races, and large events such as the popular Live After Five concert series. Many of these events take place in the recently implemented public greenspaces of The Central Green including North Boulevard Town Square, Davis S. Rhorer Plaza, and Repentance Park. The Downtown Development District strategically implemented these spaces as recommendations from downtown’s master plans in order to spur investment and provide a constant stream of attractions and activity.

In addition to implementing these unique public spaces, the DDD also manages all aspects of these greenspaces such as the beacon programming, assistance with event logistics, and maintaining the landscape in order to enhance the public’s downtown experience. The DDD, functioning as a liaison between event coordinators and City-Parish departments, also reviews event applications and assists in required permitting processes. Event information is also available and marketed through various DDD outlets, including emails, social media, the North Boulevard Town Square Media Beacon, and website calendars. The Special Event Procedures and Guidelines Handbook, available online or in our office, was developed and is maintained as an overview to the logistics and processes in event coordination. In 2023 we had a robust series of events, which is expected to be repeated in 2024. The DDD also recently acquired a technological tool that can track event attendance in 2024, called Placer.ai.

For more information on the event related resources provided by the DDD, visit www.downtownbatonrouge.org.

DOWNTOWN RECOGNITION

1 CAPITAL REGION 500

Whitney Hoffman Sayal, AICP, Executive Director of the Downtown Development District was honored to be featured in the Baton Rouge Business Report's prestigious Capitol Region 500.

2 BEST OF 225 WINNERS

Downtown Baton Rouge shines in 225 Magazine's Best of 225 Awards, with highlights including The Little Village for Best Bread, Chelsea's Live as Best Live Music Venue, the Baton Rouge Symphony for Best Performing Arts Group, the Watermark Baton Rouge as the Best Hotel.

3 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PRESENTS AT ROTARY

This past November, DDD's Executive Director had the privilege of addressing her fellow Rotarians at the Rotary Club of Baton Rouge as the session's highlighted speaker. It was an incredible opportunity to share the exciting developments and prospects of Downtown Baton Rouge.

4 LEADERSHIP LA CLASS OF 2023

Executive Director, Whitney Hoffman Sayal, was accepted as part of Leadership Louisiana Class of 2023. The group of selected leaders from around the state, visited several regions to discuss issues and opportunities.

5 GOOD GROWTH AWARDS

At the 2023 Growth Coalition Good Growth Awards, The Arts Council secured the People's Choice Award, while both River Center Theater Improvements and the Rivermark Centre were honored with additional awards.

6 DOWNTOWN ADA AWARD

Downtown Baton Rouge earned an ADA award for its commitment to accessibility, with the initial completion of the Florida Street project marking the first of six MOVEBR initiatives aimed at enhancing ADA compliance and accessibility in the downtown area.

7 APA LOUISIANA CHAPTER

Executive Director, Whitney Hoffman Sayal, was recognized by the American Planning Association Louisiana Chapter for 10+ years of service on the Executive Committee. Planning is critical to bettering communities and Whitney is proud to serve Louisiana.



SPECIAL THANKS

SPECIAL THANKS

We remain dedicated to the development and promotion of Downtown Baton Rouge as we move forward into 2024. We thank all of the countless individuals who support our mission and cause, enabling Downtown Baton Rouge to grow and develop into a place to live, work, and play. They include private developers, public agencies, and non-profit organizations. We are extremely grateful for the partnerships that make such extraordinary projects happen. Special thanks to Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome and the Metropolitan Council for the continued support of the DDD's vision.

Honorable Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome

Chief Administrative Officers Major General Glenn Curtis & Dr. James Llorens

Chief of Staff Dante Bidwell

East Baton Rouge City-Parish Metropolitan Council

Brandon Noel	District One
Chauna Banks	District Two
Rowdy Gaudet	District Three
Aaron Moak	District Four
Darryl Hurst	District Five
Cleve Dunn Jr.	District Six
LaMont Cole, Pro Tem	District Seven
Denise Amoroso	District Eight
Dwight Hudson	District Nine
Carolyn Coleman	District Ten
Laurie Adams	District Eleven
Jennifer Racca	District Twelve

DDD Commissioners

Eric Dexter	Chairwoman
Prescott Bailey	Vice Chairman
Patrick Michaels	Treasurer
Gary Jupiter	Secretary
Joshua G. Hollins	
Tara Titone	
Philip Jordan	

DDD Staff

Whitney Hoffman Sayal, AICP	Executive Director
Casey Tate	Assitant Executive Director
Ute Cress	Administrative Assistant
Morgan Lewis	Design and Marketing Coordinator
Houston Tullis	Student Intern
Sydney Milligan	Student Intern
Ethan Bergeron	Student Intern
Caroline Robertson	Student Intern



DOWNTOWN
DEVELOPMENT
DISTRICT