

# DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE A NEW ERA

*Downtown Development District Strategic Plan 2023-2028*



DOWNTOWN  
DEVELOPMENT  
DISTRICT





**Nowhere else does investment  
benefit all of Baton Rouge.**

*- DDD Commissioner*

Dear Downtown Stakeholders,

This 5-year Strategic Plan is a comprehensive guide for how the Downtown Development District (DDD) will implement projects, partnerships, and programs to capitalize on opportunities that will continue to transform Downtown Baton Rouge into a thriving place to live, work and play. In order to plan for the future of Downtown, it's important to acknowledge the accomplishments and progress the DDD has stewarded since its founding in the 1980s. Under Davis Rhorer, an individual with an undeniable passion and vision for Downtown, the DDD led the revitalization of a Downtown that had seen decades of out-migration and disinvestment. The task was monumental and was only possible because of many community partners and several master plans, including Plan Baton Rouge Phases I and II.

Over approximately three decades, working with multiple partners and champions, Davis oversaw a period of dramatic reinvestment – from the consolidation of state offices in Downtown Baton Rouge, to the restoration of hotels and social venues, to the construction of new high-rises and public parks — including a true Town Square. Davis' legacy can be found throughout Downtown Baton Rouge, as are those of the partners, philanthropists, designers, developers, and DDD staffers that helped usher in the rebirth of a thriving urban core where it once felt impossible. I'm fortunate to have served with Davis for many years, a witness to this incredible transformation.

Life post-Covid has introduced a different environment for downtowns around the world; transforming in response to virtual working technologies, the demand to live Downtown, and the increased desire for community interaction in quality places. Fortunately, due to the strong foundation built by Davis and the many others that understood the importance of a strong Downtown core, Downtown Baton Rouge emerged from the pandemic stable. However, the district faces a new set of opportunities and challenges that will progress us to the next level. Looking forward, we will celebrate the entrepreneurs and urban enthusiasts that have made Downtown their home and place of business. We will continue to attract new businesses, welcome new residents, and market our unique Downtown experience to visitors. In addition, we will pursue a Downtown that is connected to its surrounding communities and provides economic benefits for our entire region. We will be very intentional about inclusivity — both in our plans and in our projects.

Engaging and serving the public is a cornerstone of our office's principles and this strategic plan is built on stakeholder input gleaned through a rigorous process of outreach and data gathering. We believe that Downtown Baton Rouge belongs to our entire community; it is the economic driver of the entire region and the place where our citizens come together to enjoy an event, conduct business, and/or visit a cultural amenity. The projects and initiatives recommended are generated from the input we received from our Downtown stakeholders, community members, and our organizational partners. Lighting, connectivity, economic investment, housing, and capitalizing on our waterfront, were consistent themes throughout the public input process and are our office's focus areas for the next five years.

I'm proud to serve at the helm of the DDD, and I can't wait to see the successes we will achieve together in this new era.

Sincerely,



Whitney Hoffman Sayal, AICP  
Executive Director, DDD

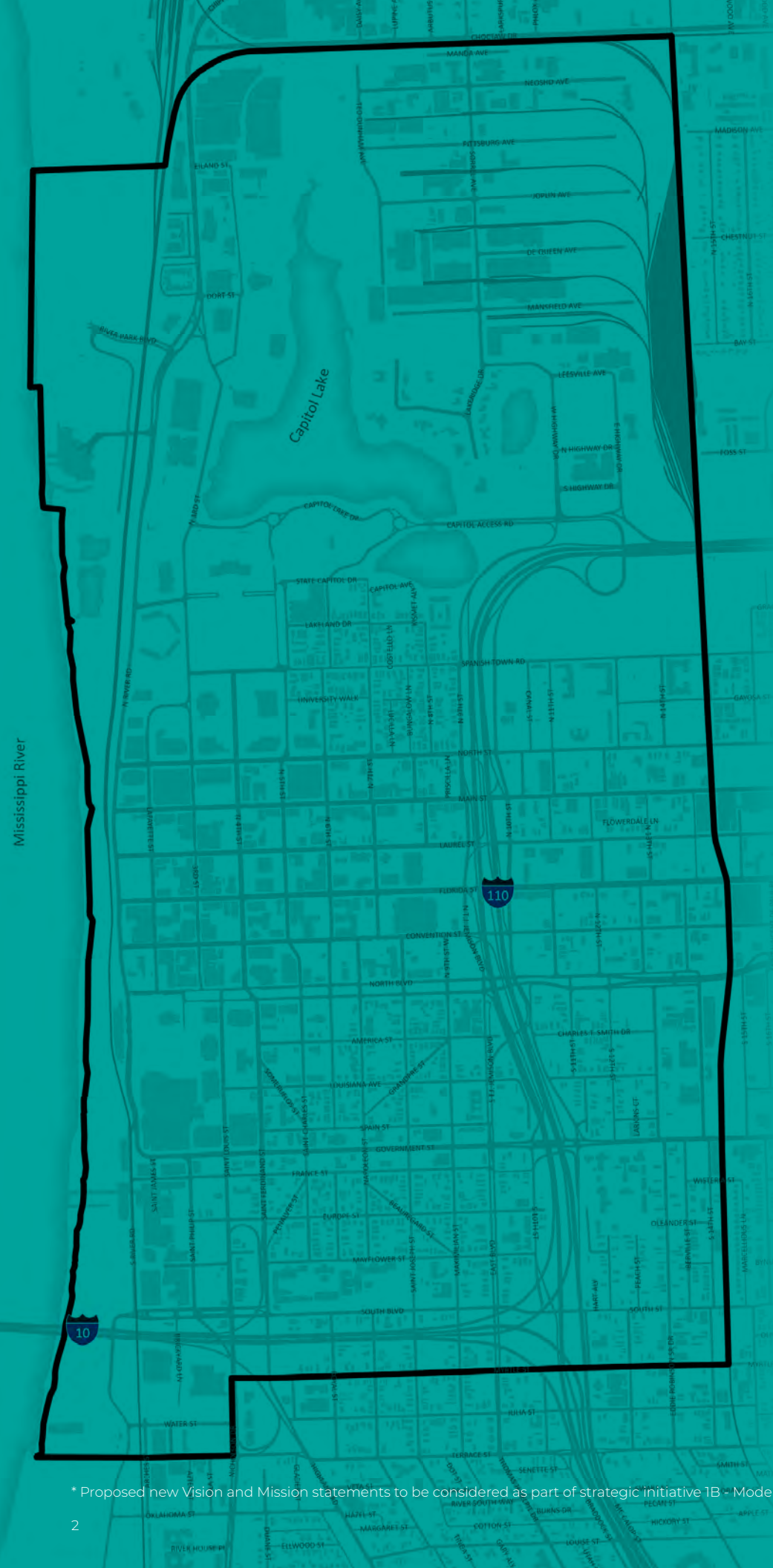




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## VISION\*

A thriving, inclusive, connected urban core that drives community well-being and economic prosperity for the entire City-Parish.

## MISSION\*

To create and sustain a Downtown Baton Rouge that serves our entire community through the planning, pursuit, and oversight of transformative initiatives and by partnering with the stakeholders that comprise the culture, commerce, and identity of the district.

## DDD STAFF

**Whitney Hoffman Sayal, AICP**  
Executive Director

**Casey Tate**  
Assistant Executive Director

**Ute Cress**  
Executive Assistant

**Open Positions**  
Development Project Directors (2)

## THE DISTRICT

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

Envisioned in the Baton Rouge 2000 plan from 1983 and established by the Louisiana Legislature in 1985 (first funded in 1987), the Downtown Development District (DDD) is a quasi-governmental agency that follows all the rules of the City of Baton Rouge – Parish of East Baton Rouge government with regard to purchasing, contracting, hiring, and other administrative functions. The agency's \$800,000 budget is funded primarily via property taxes that are voted on by district residents on a five-year cycle. Funding pays for up to five staff members to manage and coordinate projects and programs to improve Downtown Baton Rouge.

The DDD serves as a steward of master plan implementation for Downtown, including Plan Baton Rouge Phases I and II and Riverfront master plans, among others. As a result of the DDD's work over the last three decades, more than \$2.5 billion has been invested in Downtown between the public and private sectors. In addition to managing public space capital projects funded through the public sector, the DDD serves as a liaison between developers, residents, businesses, event coordinators, and the City-Parish, pursuing local, state, and federal grants to leverage City-Parish funds to implement master plan projects.

The DDD does not handle maintenance of Downtown infrastructure such as roadways or lighting (managed by other City-Parish departments), nor does it put on Downtown events, although it does support events through scheduling, management, coordination, and promotions.

## DDD COMMISSION

**Eric Dexter - Chairman**  
Downtown Business/Property Owner Representative and  
Downtown Business Association Representative  
Vice President, Civil Solutions Consulting Group, Inc.

**Jude Melville - Vice Chairman**  
Downtown Business/Property Owner Representative  
CEO, bIBANK

**Prescott Bailey - Treasurer**  
Downtown Business/Property Owner Representative  
Real Estate Developer and Consultant, Onyx Ventures

**Patrick Michaels - Secretary**  
Spanish Town Representative  
Principal, Patch Landscape

**Gary Jupiter**  
Mayor's Representative  
Area Manager, Courtyard by Marriott, Starbucks, and  
Hampton Inn & Suites

**Scott Hensgens**  
Baton Rouge Area Chamber Representative  
Managing Partner, Breazeale Sachse and Wilson LLP

**Melanie Montanaro**  
Beauregard Town Representative  
Archives Manager, Louisiana State Archives

\* Proposed new Vision and Mission statements to be considered as part of strategic initiative 1B - Modernize Governance



# LOOKING AHEAD

After decades of success in Downtown revitalization, the DDD is seeing signs of what downtowns across the country are seeing in a post-covid world: a shift in focus to residential. While commercial spaces and developments are absolutely necessary for a thriving Downtown, needs are evolving and emerging for city centers to accommodate hybrid working environments and expand investments in different models of residential living. The lines of usage are being blurred while the demand grows for community building and gathering spaces, environments for socialization, and developments that capitalize on the natural and cultural assets of a place.

In 2023, the DDD engaged Baton Rouge-based consulting firm LaFargue to help understand trends, forces, and stakeholder perspectives impacting Downtown and to develop this five-year strategic plan to guide the organization's work.

Under new leadership, the DDD has a chance to build on its past successes while hitting refresh on its mission and on the future of Downtown Baton Rouge. This is the aim of this plan – to take stock of how far Downtown Baton Rouge has come and to set a course for enhancing an urban core to serve current and future generations.

The planning process saw energy from a new generation of philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and community members who see Downtown as the heart of the Capital Region with connections to the surrounding neighborhoods and universities, and economic strengths to benefit the entire region.

This plan is designed to outline key organizational strategies and activities for the DDD to help realize that future. By adopting this path forward, the DDD Commission is challenging the DDD to plan, fundraise, collaborate, and execute to help Downtown Baton Rouge thrive in the decades to come.



# METHODOLOGY & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The process for developing this strategic plan was intentionally designed to emphasize stakeholder input and engagement. Because the vitality of Downtown Baton Rouge has impacts throughout the Capital Region, it was important not only to gain perspectives from those who live and/or work in the district, but to also get input from citizens throughout the surrounding area. The following methods show how a sequence of research, collaboration, and planning created a throughline from community engagement to organizational strategy.



DESK RESEARCH

Initial research included reviewing the DDD's recent history, the vision and philosophy that has historically driven the organization, strategic and marketing documents, and comparable organizations in other communities that could serve as models or analogues to learn from:

- Grants and grant applications for development and programming
- Previous strategic plans and master plans
- Articles of governance
- Legislation governing DDD boundaries and taxation
- Job Descriptions
- Digital, print, and traditional marketing materials

SURVEY

The planning team then administered a survey to Downtown Baton Rouge stakeholders, leveraging the DDD’s contacts and partners as well as a public outreach effort to achieve broad distribution and participation. For maximum survey participation outreach, the DDD worked with 225 Magazine to conduct social media outreach, sent a press release for publication in area news sources, participated in interviews with a variety of media outlets, posted signs on sidewalks around the central business district and Downtown neighborhoods, and promoted the survey through email marketing and boosted social media posts. Combined with learnings from desk research, the results of this survey helped guide planning and topics for subsequent interviews and roundtable discussions. Thanks to the coordinated outreach effort, 1,408 respondents completed the survey representing the following key stakeholder groups:

- Staff and DDD Commission members
- Downtown residents
- Downtown business owners (essential retail and professional services)
- Downtown employees
- Downtown Realtors and developers
- Residents of Greater Baton Rouge that visit and/or utilize Downtown

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Interviews offered a chance to dive deeper into important topics identified through desk research and surveys. The planning team interviewed the following participants from the staff, board, and other stakeholder groups:

- **Prescott Bailey**, DDD Commissioner
- **Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman**, District 10
- **Eric Dexter**, DDD Commissioner
- **Scott Hensgens**, DDD Commissioner
- **Whitney Hoffman Sayal, AICP**, DDD Executive Director
- **Gary Jupiter**, DDD Commissioner
- **Mary Jane Marcantel**, DDD resident
- **Jude Melville**, DDD Commissioner
- **Patrick Michaels**, DDD Commissioner
- **Melanie Montanaro**, DDD Commissioner
- **John Spain**, Baton Rouge Area Foundation/Downtown Stakeholder
- **Casey Tate**, DDD Assistant Executive Director

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

To close out research, the planning team held three roundtable discussions with Downtown stakeholders, providing opportunities for creative brainstorming and collaboration. Roundtables were divided into three groups: residents, business and development interests, and allied organizations.

RESIDENTIAL ROUNDTABLE

**Mahalie LeFranc Kyzar**  
Beauregard Town representative

**Jeff Gober**  
Spanish Town representative

**Karen Chustz**  
Beauregard Town resident

**Lauren Crump**  
Central Business District resident

BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT ROUNDTABLE

**Jessie Babcock**  
Beau Box Realtors

**Marcus Bonton**  
Bonton Associates

**Joshua Combs**  
Baton Rouge Area Chamber

**Charles Daniel**  
GeauxRide.com

**Derek Fitch**  
Fitch Development

**B. Anthony Kimble**  
Kimble Property

**Luke Lognion**  
BRASS

ALLIED ORGANIZATIONS ROUNDTABLE

**Dante Bidwell**  
EBR City-Parish Government

**Michael DiResto**  
Baton Rouge Area Chamber

**Mark Drennen**  
Capital Area Finance Authority

**Jonathan Grimes**  
Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge

**Jill Kidder**  
Visit Baton Rouge

**Lauren Lambert-Tompkins**  
Downtown Business Association

**Chris Meyer**  
Baton Rouge Area Foundation

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

Upon completion of research, the planning team delivered survey results to the DDD and compiled findings into a series of key insights to drive strategic planning. Findings were presented to DDD staff at the outset of a one-day collaborative workshop, followed by visioning activities and detailed planning exercises. The outcomes of the workshop provided the essential structure of this strategic plan.

Following the workshop, the planning team, along with DDD staff, shared workshop outcomes with DDD Commissioners and Downtown stakeholders through two small group feedback sessions. During these sessions, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, weigh in, and provide further input into the plan.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Based on outcomes of research and collaborative planning, the team put pen to paper to draft this strategic plan, working with DDD leadership to undergo a process of review and refinement of the document, and received formal adoption by the DDD Commission on September 12, 2023.







Today's downtowns are more aptly considered as central connectivity districts — essential platforms where people socialize, cooperate, and collaborate.

- Richard Florida

# THE PLAN



# MASTER PLAN VS. STRATEGIC PLAN

In the Downtown Baton Rouge context, a master plan is a dynamic long-term planning document that provides a conceptual layout — or blueprint — to guide future growth and development. Master planning is about making the connection between buildings, social settings, and their surrounding environments. It recommends infrastructure improvements, incentives, land uses, and policies intended to improve quality of life and spur growth. As evidenced in Plan Baton Rouge Phases I and II, key stakeholders and allied organizations worked with the DDD and planning experts over the years to enact master plans that bring urban design and planning principles to Downtown. These plans have significantly contributed to the DDD's revitalization and growth successes to date. Master plans can be broadly focused across many aspects of a community, or they can hone in on specific assets and/or infrastructure, creating guidelines for concepts in areas such as parking, lighting, and riverfront development.

When conducted appropriately, master plans incorporate community input and best practices in design to prescribe solutions for the need at hand. This can take the form of land use recommendations, zoning ordinances, overlay districts, economic development packages, policy recommendations, design standards, a “pattern language” for architectural design, and other guidelines for development of public and private assets. Master plans then require adoption by the agencies responsible for implementing the recommendations of the plan, whether through enforcement or through proactive project management and execution over time.

The DDD has essentially wrapped up implementation of the most recent district-wide master plan, Plan Baton Rouge Phase II (approximately 75% has been implemented). Soon, the DDD will set its sights on conducting the outreach, planning, and fundraising needed to develop a yet-to-be-named Phase III master plan. A new master planning effort will include taking a fresh look at what hasn't been implemented from previous plans, understanding why, and considering how the current environment may influence new solutions appropriate for the future of Downtown Baton Rouge.

While there may be substantial areas of crossover, this strategic plan is different from a master plan. The strategic planning process that led to this document was designed as a collaborative effort that took into account the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders and synthesized that with the vision of DDD leadership to guide the operations of the organization for the next five years. This plan is an adaptable, forward-looking roadmap that communicates the DDD's organizational goals and lays out the actions and resources needed to achieve them, as well as measures for tracking progress. Initiatives from this plan will have direct and indirect linkages to a future master plan. For example, this plan recommends housing, transportation, and lighting efforts that will likely be integrated into the master plan. These components may be developed individually or as part of a broader, unified comprehensive planning process.

# THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE PLAN

Through stakeholder outreach and collaboration with the DDD and commissioners, key topics emerged as strategic pillars for the DDD, constituting a planning framework for a variety of strategic initiatives.

The following pages lay out a series of strategic initiatives to advance the vision and mission. These initiatives will serve as a guide for DDD operations over the next five years but should also adapt to changes within the district, external trends or market shifts, and internal factors that may realign priorities. These types of factors could include but are not limited to staffing and internal bandwidth, financial capacity, priorities of key partners, and changes in real estate or economic markets.

For each initiative, this plan defines a few guiding assumptions:

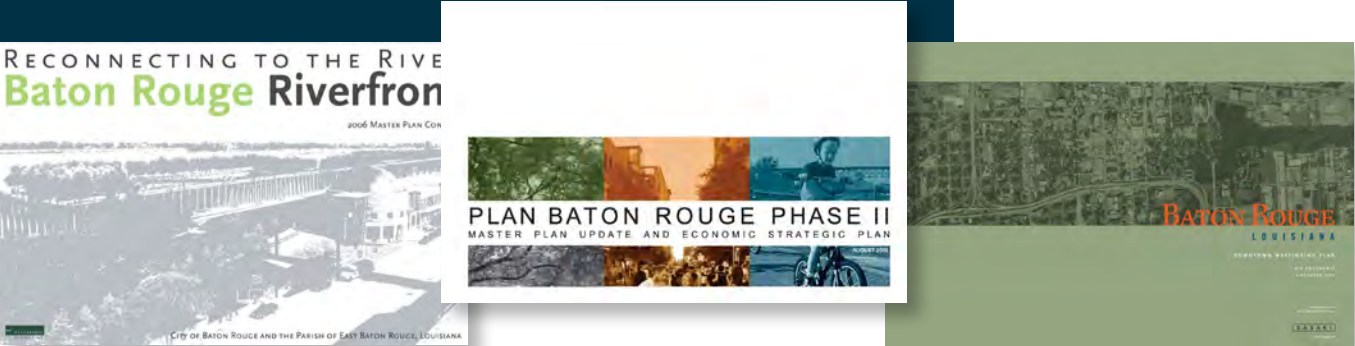
- **Goal:** The overall purpose of the initiative – consider it the “Why” behind each activity
- **Action Steps:** High-level tasks to be carried out for initiative execution – these represent general guidance and should be considered subject to adaptation over time
- **Performance Metrics:** Categorical measures at varying levels of specificity that will help track progress toward the initiative's goal – these metrics can be made more quantifiable on an annual basis as the DDD considers what it can accomplish each year
- **Timeline:** Because not everything can be executed at once, the timelines are an attempt to logically pace out the initiatives according to expectations of resources and effort required
- **Resources:** Educated assumptions regarding the human and financial resources needed for each initiative – subject to re-evaluation and change

## FOUR PILLARS:

- 1 Organizational Sustainability & Responsible Governance
- 2 Building Up the Core: Planning, Projects, & Infrastructure
- 3 Improving the Downtown Experience for All Members of our Community
- 4 Enhancing Communications for Transparency, Brand Building, & Progress



For a full collection of the DDD's master plans, visit [downtownbatonrouge.org/about-ddd/master-plans](http://downtownbatonrouge.org/about-ddd/master-plans)





# 1

## ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY & RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE

Research revealed the perspective that the DDD could have maximum positive impact with increased funding and resources, streamlined governing documents and procedures, and a solidified relationship with the DBA.

### 1A INCREASE FINANCIAL STABILITY

#### GOAL

Increase the DDD's capacity to perform critical functions, implement transformational projects, and have a positive impact on Downtown

#### ACTION STEPS

1. Create a 501(c)3 organization to open up greater fundraising opportunities, including private fundraising
  - » Research legalities and ensure there are no risks or conflicts of interest that would be barriers to raising funds
  - » Define appropriate governance structure for a nonprofit and clarify its relationship to the DDD and the DDD Commission
  - » Establish a Board of Directors and staffing structure for the new organization
  - » Incorporate the organization and set up appropriate accounts
  - » Integrate with DDD strategic goals and priorities
2. Develop and execute a fundraising strategy for the newly formed 501(c)3
  - » Research potential funding sources and their feasibility, including:
    - Parking meter revenues
    - Grants
    - Private donations
    - Boundary expansion possibilities
    - Docking fees
    - Entertainment tax
    - Taxing districts
    - State funds
    - Private property owner contributions tied to specific initiatives
  - » Plan and execute fundraising initiatives with accompanying partnerships and campaigns

#### TIMELINE

Begin researching nonprofit organization and funding source feasibility immediately, launch 501(c)3 in Q2 2024, and continue indefinitely

#### RESOURCES

Staff time, heavy involvement from Executive Director, support from Commissioners with relevant expertise

#### SUCCESS MEASURES

- Establishment of 501(c)3
- Increase in overall revenues tied to specific, pre-defined project and resource goals
- Establishment of a sufficient reserve fund



# 1B

## MODERNIZE GOVERNANCE

**GOAL**

Update DDD bylaws and governance structure for higher organizational function

### ACTION STEPS

1. Review City-Parish ordinances, State legislation, and DDD bylaws to ensure alignment and compliance
2. Update and formally approve revised Articles of Governance
  - » Amend bylaws to address any misalignment discovered in step 1 above
  - » Formally adopt the revised DDD Vision and Mission Statements defined in this plan
  - » Amend the DDD Commission schedule and committee structure for ideal engagement
    - Revisit the meeting cadence
    - Create a mechanism for regular commission feedback (e.g., surveys and evaluations, annual retreat)
    - Develop a committee structure to support strategic plan implementation, including through annual planning
    - Develop a Commissioner Welcome Packet for orientation and training needs (e.g., onboarding checklist, Commission member responsibilities and commitment documentation)

### TIMELINE

Begin Q4 2023 and complete by end of 2024

### RESOURCES

Staff time (Executive Director), support from Commission Executive Committee

### SUCCESS MEASURES

- Commission approval of revised bylaws
- Strong Commission engagement
- Commissioner Welcome Packet completion
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities for Commissioners
- Active committees that help advance strategic plan and annual plan implementation

# 1C

## CLARIFY ROLES BETWEEN DDD AND DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

**GOAL**

Enhance the DDD’s complementary partnership with the DBA through events and Downtown Baton Rouge marketing for a thriving District and robust community engagement

### ACTION STEPS

1. Participate in current and ongoing DBA strategic planning efforts
  - » Contribute ideas for DDD/DBA synergies and cooperation
2. Distinguish roles and identify opportunities for DDD to support the two key DBA functions:
  - » Events – the DDD can assist with marketing and logistics and work with the City-Parish to streamline the event permitting process as well as enhance and maintain event infrastructure
  - » Marketing and Media – the DBA’s work to raise awareness and cultivate the cultural and economic identity of Downtown Baton Rouge helps shape the character of the DDD’s planning and stewardship of development
3. Collaborate with DBA to author and execute a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations to establish a shared vision, clarify distinguished organizational functions, and outline ways of working together

### TIMELINE

Support strategic planning immediately, distinguish roles upon approval of the plan, partner and support the DBA ongoing

### RESOURCES

DDD voting member on the DBA board, DDD staff resources as needed

### SUCCESS MEASURES

- A shared understanding between the two organizations of roles, responsibilities, and ways of working together
- Execution of MOU
- Mutually beneficial outcomes of DDD and DBA programming



# 2

## BUILDING UP THE CORE: PLANNING, PROJECTS, & INFRASTRUCTURE

Stakeholders communicated excitement for the DDD's potential to guide and support projects to improve infrastructure and capitalize on physical and cultural assets of Downtown Baton Rouge and the surrounding communities.

### 2A

#### CAPITALIZE ON DOWNTOWN ASSETS

##### GOAL

Make Downtown a unique and remarkable place to live, work, and play

##### ACTION STEPS

1. Hire Development Project Director
  - » Update position description
  - » Work with City-Parish to advertise and hire for the role
2. Prioritize current and future transformative projects
  - » Develop a pipeline list of assets that are and/or could be the focus of transformative projects including but not limited to:
    - Third Street
    - The riverfront (including bike and pedestrian paths on the riverfront, improvements to Riverfront Plaza)
    - Downtown retail hubs/corridors (including street tree replacements and wayfinding improvements)
    - Community connections and gateways to surrounding neighborhoods (including Greenway connections to Government Street)
    - Capitol Lakes
  - » Conduct initial exploratory research to identify opportunities for each
  - » Evaluate impact and effort for each project
  - » Prioritize efforts and pursue funding, partnerships, planning, and development opportunities
3. Work with partners to coordinate and promote a robust program of events throughout the year
4. Convene event planning meetings w/ event coordinators including Downtown partners (e.g., Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge, Downtown Business Association, Visit Baton Rouge, 225 Magazine, Country Roads, Business Owners, Promoters and Booking Agents)
  - » Discuss the gaps that exist with event programming in Downtown and ways to bolster a more consistent event/festival catalog
  - » Work with City-Parish, Baton Rouge Police Department, and Visit Baton Rouge to streamline the event-planning guide for Downtown Baton Rouge events

##### TIMELINE

Hire Development Project Director in Q1 2024, explore, prioritize, and pursue projects ongoing

##### RESOURCES

DDD budget allocation for Development Project Director position, various funding sources for project execution, participation from partners in project development/execution and event-planning

##### SUCCESS MEASURES

- Hiring of a Development Project Director
- Successful execution of future projects that focus on Downtown assets
- Publication of event-planning guides
- Positive feedback from event hosts on event-planning guides
- Increased quality and/or number of events
- Increase event attendance



2B

CULTIVATE  
RELATIONSHIPS  
AND CONNECTIONS

GOAL

Partner with Developers and allied organizations to enhance connectivity between Downtown Baton Rouge and surrounding neighborhoods to establish an integrated, thriving urban core

ACTION STEPS

1. Host a workshop with allied organizations spanning Downtown and adjacent communities
- » Participants should represent residents, investors, businesses, and organizations including but not limited to the following interests:
- Surrounding neighborhoods

- Reinvestment developers and real estate investors

- Business and merchant associations

- Foundations

- Economic development organizations

- Higher education and research institutions

- Community-based nonprofit organizations

- Residents

- City-Parish and State officials
- » Develop ways to consistently communicate and collaborate across boundaries
- » Identify urban development connections and opportunities
- » Identify current and new planning and development initiatives across connected communities
- » Discuss interest and garner buy-in for a broader “Urban Core” focused master planning effort to link Downtown and neighboring urban areas (advocating for a master plan for Downtown connecting to our urban neighbors)
- Consider branding implications and opportunities of this broader community purview

- Generate ideas for funding sources for such a plan
2. Establish a cooperative action committee of key representatives
3. Pursue and solidify funding for a plan
- 4.Oversee an “Urban Core” planning process that continues to engage key stakeholders from Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods
5. Partner with stakeholder organizations to implement

TIMELINE

Hold Workshop in Q1 2024, publish plan by Q2 of 2026

RESOURCES

DDD staff and Commission leadership, participation from City-Parish, relevant governmental agencies, allied organizations, and neighboring stakeholders, funding for a master plan, public and private investment in implementation

SUCCESS MEASURES

- Meaningful dialogue and engagement with neighboring communities
- Identification of master plan funding
- Broad engagement in planning process
- Adoption of master plan and associated policy recommendations
- New developments and connections to enhance urban core

2C

RESPOND TO  
HOUSING DEMAND

GOAL

Increase the Downtown housing supply to better meet demand, growing the population of Downtown residents, the strength of the community, and the health of the Downtown economy

ACTION STEPS

1. Engage key partners in addressing ways to meet the demand for housing in Downtown Baton Rouge:
- » City-Parish and State Offices of Community Development

» East Baton Rouge Parish Planning Commission

» Build Baton Rouge

» Capital Area Finance Authority

» Louisiana Housing Authority

» State of Louisiana

» Developers

» Property Owners
2. Advocate for a new state tax abatement program for new housing to spur development
3. Develop a housing master plan
- » Additive to or a component of the next master plan for Downtown Baton Rouge

» Pursue a study that better quantifies housing demand

» Consider density and scale appropriate for different parts of the district

» Identify affordable options for residents at various socio-economic tiers

» Identify opportunities for infill development and increased housing options

TIMELINE

Begin engaging housing partners immediately, convene a meeting with partners to advocate for the tax abatement program beginning in 2024, and develop the housing master plan by Q2 2025

RESOURCES

Staff time, funding for a housing master plan

SUCCESS MEASURES

- Observable examples of meaningful collaboration with housing partners
- New tax abatement program proposed and approved
- Adoption of a housing master plan
- Sustainable year-over-year increases in housing stock at appropriate scales and prices that align with demand
- Increase in the number of occupied residences and overall Downtown population



# 2D

## ENHANCE DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

GOAL

Integrate Downtown transportation components comprehensively for improved connectivity and more diverse mobility options

ACTION STEPS

1. Conduct mobility research and survey/inventory Downtown's transportation needs including compiling existing studies
2. Estimate cost to develop a transportation master plan
3. Raise/identify funds to support planning
4. Execute an RFP process for a planning firm
5. Work with planning firm, Louisiana DOTD, and the City-Parish to develop a comprehensive transportation plan considering all the critical elements that must share right-of-ways:
  - » Bus Rapid Transit
  - » Bicycle and pedestrian transportation
  - » One-way to two-way conversions
  - » On-street parking
  - » Electric vehicles charging
  - » Florida St. and Government St. corridor
  - » Gateways and connections to surrounding communities
6. Address connectivity to current and future water- and rail-based transit
7. Integrate transportation master plan with next Downtown Baton Rouge master plan

TIMELINE

Research and inventory in Q4 2024, identify funds in 2025, kick off process in mid 2025 for a completed plan in Q1 2026

RESOURCES

Staff time to research and manage process, funding to pay for master plan

SUCCESS MEASURES

- Successful compilation of transportation studies and needs
- Funding for transportation master plan
- Adoption of transportation master plan
- Implementation of master plan recommendations

# 3

## IMPROVING THE DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE FOR ALL MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY

Three connected issues that affect stakeholder sentiments with regard to the experience of Downtown Baton Rouge came up regularly during research: cleanliness, safety, and lighting.





3A

ESTABLISH A CLEAN  
& SAFE PROGRAM

GOAL

Create an inviting and attractive Downtown where people feel safe at all hours of the day

ACTION STEPS

1. Engage with the City-Parish to clarify maintenance plans and responsibilities and to develop an MOU for pursuing and funding a “Clean & Safe” program

2. Conduct a study to estimate costs for establishing and running a Clean & Safe program in Downtown Baton Rouge

3. Leveraging a newly established 501(c)3 affiliated with the DDD, identify grants and fundraise to create a budget for the program

4. Administer an RFP process to select a vendor
  - » Duties will include cleaning resources and safety ambassadors
  - » Ambassadors will communicate with Downtown visitors, stakeholders, and security personnel/officers.

5. Work with City-Parish to establish oversight and management of the program (may require additional funding for DDD management position, depending on scope)

6. Report and publicize the impacts and success of the program to raise awareness of the quality and safety of the Downtown experience

TIMELINE

Begin discussion with City-Parish immediately, launch program in Q1 2025

RESOURCES

501(c)3 organization, Public and private dollars to pay for the program, DDD staff time to plan. Launch, and oversee the program

SUCCESS MEASURES

- Identification of funding for Clean & Safe program
  - Launch of Clean & Safe program
  - Cleaner public spaces, reductions in litter
  - Reduction in crimes
  - Improved perceptions of safety in both daytime and nighttime circumstances

3B

ENGAGE PARTNERS  
IN SAFETY EFFORTS

GOAL

To empower Downtown stakeholders to understand and communicate the realities versus misconceptions about safety in Downtown Baton Rouge, and to be able to de-escalate instances of tension or crisis

ACTION STEPS

1. Continue regular meetings with BRPD 5th District

2. Begin “Mythbusters” messaging via DDD communications channels dispelling myths about safety and crime in Downtown Baton Rouge

3. Partner with subject-matter experts in de-escalation to bring training to Downtown retailers, hospitality businesses, and other stakeholders that may be confronted with challenging instances of tension, crisis, or crime

4. Partner with economic development organizations to develop informational videos and familiarization tours with current or prospective businesses and employees to highlight assets of Downtown and demystify confusion around safety and crime in Downtown

5. Partner with community organizations to develop programs and initiatives that improve the safety of Downtown

TIMELINE

Begin “Mythbusters” messaging in Q2 2024, launch de-escalation training, videos, and fam tours in Q1 2025

RESOURCES

DDD communications staff time, participation from law enforcement, subject-matter experts in de-escalation, and economic development organizations (BRAC, LED, North Baton Rouge Economic Development District)

SUCCESS MEASURES

- Improved perceptions of safety in Downtown Baton Rouge
  - Strong participation in de-escalation training
  - Broad engagement with tours and videos



## GOAL

Improve the Downtown experience through enhanced lighting and visibility at night

## ACTION STEPS

1. Work with City-Parish to encourage LED upgrades to increase efficiency of street light grid and reduce degree of maintenance
  - » Use efficient light to brighten the streets of Downtown and eliminate stretches of darkness
2. Partner with allied organizations to implement artistic lighting and pedestrian-scale lighting enhancements such as
  - » Colorful or artistic lighting plans for retail corridors
  - » Collaboration with arts and community organizations for light sculpture or other artistic and interactive lighting features to enhance public spaces
  - » Engage with groups such as the BRAC canvas trip committee focused on Downtown to explore how they can support funding and/or action for lighting initiatives
3. Incorporate gateway lighting as a priority, especially along access points at Interstate 110

## TIMELINE

Begin work with City-Parish in Q1 2024, pursue artistic and inviting lighting installations in 2025-2026

## RESOURCES

City-Parish human and financial resources to implement, participation and funding by partners and grants for other enhanced lighting projects

## SUCCESS MEASURES

- Comprehensive lighting improvements throughout Downtown Baton Rouge
- Reductions in required maintenance and cost for lighting
- Reduction in dark areas in public spaces and along Downtown streets
- Artistic lighting installations that not only enhance visibility but create an attraction and point of interest for Downtown Baton Rouge
- Inviting lighting installations at key gateways and access points

## 4

## ENHANCING COMMUNICATIONS FOR TRANSPARENCY, BRAND BUILDING, & PROGRESS

Consistently, research made apparent the need for transparency, communication, and collaboration for the DDD across stakeholder groups to build a sense of identity and pride in Downtown.



# 4A

## FACILITATE DISTRICT NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

### GOAL

Connect Downtown neighborhoods to each other and other Downtown stakeholders to enable knowledge sharing and collaboration

### ACTION STEPS

1. Set up a meeting with commissioners representing Downtown neighborhoods to create a plan
  - » Establish objectives for regular combined engagements with neighborhoods
  - » Generate ideas for meeting cadence and types of gatherings (traditional meetings vs. clean-ups or other community-improvement events)
  - » Develop a standing agenda to incorporate as part of these gatherings, considering the following example topics:
    - Crime and safety tactics and statistics
    - Dealing with blight
    - Zoning and development topics
    - Community engagement success and lessons
    - Cross promotion of events and other initiatives
2. Plan and hold periodic neighborhood engagements to bring communities together
3. Track and measure effectiveness of meetings, adapt and refine meeting agenda and plans as needed

### TIMELINE

Develop a plan in second half of 2024, Hold first meeting in Q4 2024

### RESOURCES

Staff time to plan, organize, and communicate, Commissioner time and support

### SUCCESS MEASURES

- Neighborhood meeting participation
- Success with objectives established with commissioners
- Clear sharing, cross-promoting, and relationship building across neighborhood lines

# 4B

## IMPROVE DOWNTOWN MARKETING

### GOAL

Leverage data and communications to increase positive perceptions of Downtown and establish a brand that appeals to the community and potential investors in Downtown Baton Rouge

### ACTION STEPS

1. Create and hire a full-time design and marketing position
  - » Work with City-Parish to advertise and hire position
2. Gather best available data to be shared
  - » Crime Data
  - » IDA report: The Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities
  - » Explore other data tools and sources
3. Update and market the Development Toolkit
4. Develop and implement a marketing strategy
  - » Define audiences
  - » Establish marketing and communications objectives
  - » Develop a social media strategy and calendar based on objectives
  - » Redesign newsletter and develop a revised content marketing strategy
  - » Prioritize an increased earned media presence
  - » Highlight DDD achievements, partners and stakeholders, Downtown events and developments, and Downtown quality of life
5. Contract with a creative firm to implement a DDD brand refresh
6. Coordinate/participate in discussion with key partners (e.g., VBR, DBA, BRAC, etc.) to develop a shared vision for branding Downtown Baton Rouge

### TIMELINE

Gather data and hire design and marketing role in Q1 2024, develop and implement marketing strategy in 2024, launch rebrand in Q1 2025

### RESOURCES

Design and marketing specialist, funding for newsletter redesign and future rebranding efforts

### SUCCESS MEASURES

- Hiring of design and marketing role
- Emergence of a clear, strong case for Downtown investment based on data and Development Toolkit
- Increased social media and content marketing analytics
- Increased audience engagement according to targets established for rebrand





# PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The four pillars of this plan are full of interdependencies that will impact implementation and influence progress on a regular basis. Adaptability will be key to success as the DDD rolls out its strategic initiatives. With that in mind, the implementation timeline at right lays out a baseline approach for appropriate timing, organized by the pillars. This timing is based not only on cross-initiative dependencies, but also on anticipated resource capacity and availability.

## IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Pillar	Initiative	'23	'24				'25				'26				'27				'28		
		Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3
1. ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY & RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE	1A - Increase Financial Stability			◆																	
				LAUNCH 501(c)3																	
	1B - Modernize Governance					◆															
						ADOPT AMENDMENTS															
	1C - Clarify Roles between DDD and Downtown Business Association																				
						ONGOING SUPPORT FOR DBA															
2. BUILDING UP THE CORE: PLANNING, PROJECTS, & INFRASTRUCTURE	2A - Capitalize on Downtown Assets		◆																		
			HIRE																		
	2B - Cultivate Relationships and Connections		◆										◆								
			WORKSHOP										LAUNCH URBAN CORE PLAN								
	2C - Respond to Housing Demand							◆													
								LAUNCH HOUSING PLAN													
	2D - Enhance Downtown Transportation Options											◆									
												LAUNCH TRANSPORTATION PLAN									
3. IMPROVING THE DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE FOR ALL MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY	3A - Establish a Clean & Safe Program							◆													
								LAUNCH CLEAN & SAFE PROGRAM													
	3B - Engage Partners in Safety Efforts							◆													
								LAUNCH TRAININGS, VIDEOS, AND TOURS													
	3C - Improve Lighting																				
4. IMPROVING THE DOWNTOWN EXPERIENCE FOR ALL MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY	4A - Facilitate District Neighborhood Connections					◆															
						FIRST JOINT NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING															
	4B - Improve Downtown Marketing		◆					◆													
			HIRE					LAUNCH REBRAND													



# IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE

For successful implementation of the strategic plan, it is recommended that the DDD Commission play strong, collaborative roles with DDD staff and partners to facilitate progress and accountability. A committee structure that aligns with the plan's four pillars can bring role clarity and transparency to the implementation process, with committees meeting regularly outside of commission meetings and providing updates to the full DDD Commission at commission meetings. Committees would also be responsible for supporting annual planning and budgeting related to their areas of focus. The following committee structure should be considered:

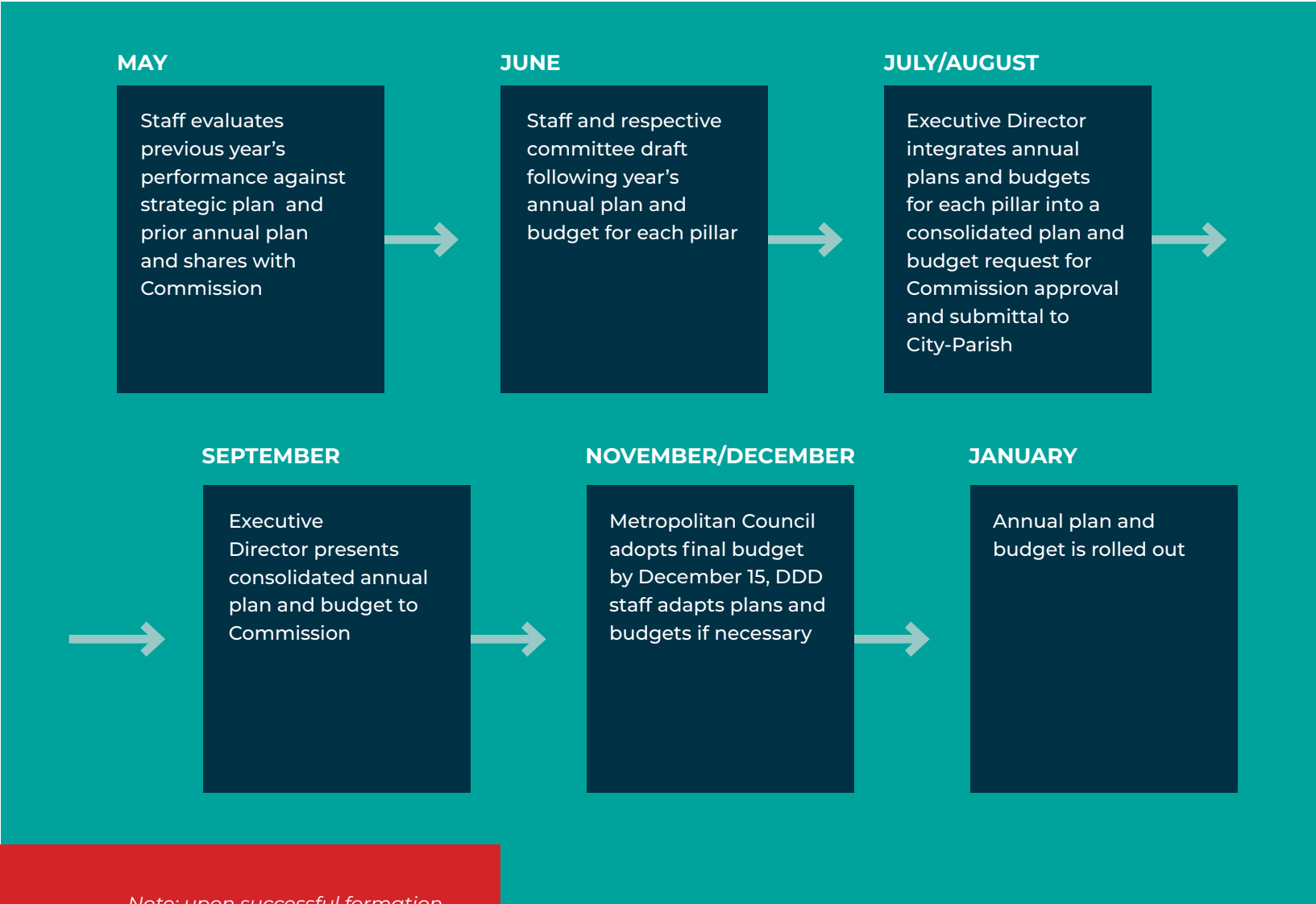
- **Executive Committee** – The Commission’s existing Executive Committee should be responsible for oversight and support of the DDD’s efforts in Pillar 1 - Organizational Sustainability and Responsible Governance. This includes initiatives related to financial sustainability, governance, and DBA relations.
- **Planning and Projects Committee** – This committee should include individuals with expertise in master planning, design, development, and project management to support implementation of Pillar 2 - Building up the Core: Planning, Projects, & Infrastructure. Responsibilities would include helping DDD staff with planning and implementation of housing and transportation plans and this committee would play a leading role in advancing the development of the next master plan for Downtown Baton Rouge.
- **Clean & Safe Committee** – Commission members with backgrounds in business and/or property ownership and with connections to other business, public safety, mental health, and/or blight remediation expertise would be great fits for this committee, as would stakeholders with an interest in the quality of the Downtown Baton Rouge experience. This committee would support implementation of Pillar 3 - Improving the Downtown Experience for all Members of our Community, overseeing the Clean & Safe program and lighting initiatives.
- **Marketing and Outreach Committee** – This committee would support Pillar 4 - Enhancing Communications for Transparency, Brand Building, & Progress and could benefit from commissioners that live in Downtown Baton Rouge neighborhoods, as well as those with expertise in marketing, branding, and/or community outreach.



# ANNUAL PLANNING PROCESS

The annual planning process is a useful way to ensure the DDD is operationalizing strategic initiatives and practically applying success measures to evaluate performance on a more granular yearly basis. It also provides a formal opportunity to consider updates to the strategic plan, maintaining relevance even as external factors and other disruptions may alter timelines and milestone targets as initially planned.

The DDD submits its annual budget request to the City-Parish each year in August for the following fiscal year, which begins on January 1. The Metropolitan Council adopts a final budget as part of its annual budgeting process by December 15. The graphic below illustrates general guidelines for how the DDD and its supporting committees can develop annual plans and budgets to align with the City-Parish fiscal cycle.



*Note: upon successful formation of a 501(c)3 (see initiative 1A), an annual planning and budgeting process will need to be established separately, but in coordination with the DDD annual planning process.*



## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

A substantial amount of data was gathered through the research phase of the planning process and more detailed reports covering surveys, interviews, and roundtables have been provided to the DDD to make it possible to dive deeper into stakeholder sentiment. For the purposes of understanding key takeaways from the research, the planning team synthesized the data into the following set of themes.

**These themes are not reflective of the DDD's perspectives and do not represent any formal stances on behalf of the organization, the DDD Commission, or any other constituency, but rather were developed based on recurring comments and observations obtained through the various methods of stakeholder data gathering.**

## LET THERE BE HOUSING

Prior to the pandemic, downtowns across the country had seen significant increases in residential demand and supply. During the pandemic, people sought recreational and safe social opportunities, flocking to places that were walkable and provided recreational and cultural amenities – downtowns offered walkability, quality public greenspace, cultural destinations, and recreational opportunities. After the pandemic residential interest continued to grow, but remote working lessened worker presence on the streets. Fortunately, Downtown Baton Rouge was not heavily impacted by this working trend as developers began converting office space to residential and multi-use space prior to the pandemic with the assistance of federal and state rehabilitation tax credits. Continued development of housing however, will require incentives that facilitate building on vacant properties.

1. More housing is in demand. National data shows demand for housing in and near downtowns. Moody's Analytics predicts construction of apartments in downtowns will be at twice the rate of non-CBD areas in the next decade.
2. Downtown residents want new housing in their established neighborhoods, preferring single-family and duplexes/triplexes/fourplexes.
3. More affordable housing is needed. Supply of housing has been too expensive for many. Rents in Downtown are perceived to be comparatively high. There are many areas to add housing:
  - » Luxury housing mixed with retail near and on the river
  - » Less expensive options on parcels near I-110, including the post office site and Downtown East
  - » Townhomes and multi-family developments in the CBD
  - » Infill housing in Spanish Town and Beauregard Town
4. Mechanisms for adding housing include a penalty on vacant/blighted lots coupled with a property tax abatement for new construction.
5. Housing solves other problems. More people living in Downtown makes the area safer. They become promoters of Downtown and spend with existing and new retail businesses.

# 75%

Residential survey respondents that said they want more housing in Downtown

# 40%

Downtown worker survey respondents that said they would like to live in Downtown

**We need more housing, everywhere. There's a lot of space to get all that in.**

- DDD Commissioner, Executive Committee

**If we have a critical mass of residents down here, there will be people with eyes on the street. It will solve the empty storefronts and limited-hours for restaurants. More residents solve all the problems.**

- DDD Commissioner



## A CLEAN AND SAFE DOWNTOWN

Stakeholders perceive a problem with homelessness in Downtown, and there are varying views on how to deal with it. Crime is a worry at night, especially after the clubs close at 2 a.m. Some people interviewed for this project said Downtown needs better maintenance, and presents a bad first impression to out-of-town visitors.

It was recommended that the DDD work with city officials to reduce the homeless population, hire a firm to regularly clean Downtown and to be ambassadors for the area. Workers for this firm could direct unhoused people to housing resources in the City-Parish.

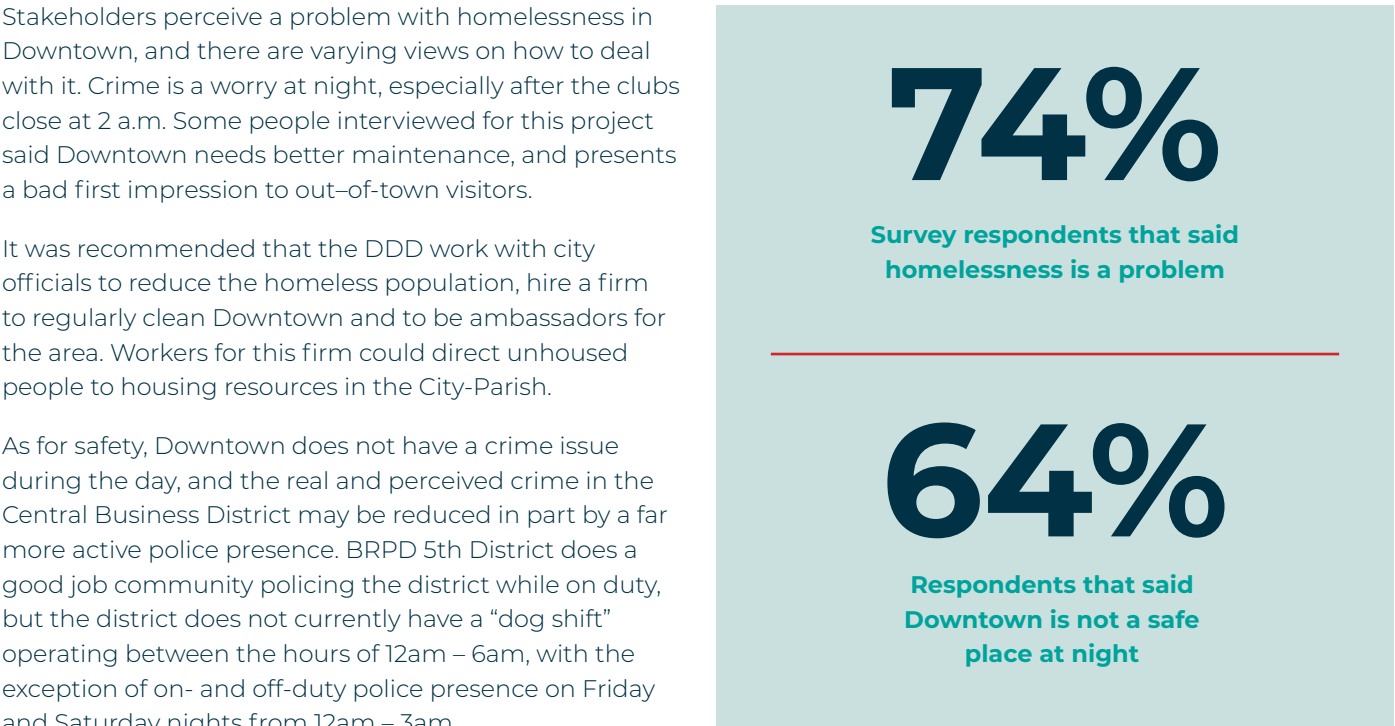
As for safety, Downtown does not have a crime issue during the day, and the real and perceived crime in the Central Business District may be reduced in part by a far more active police presence. BRPD 5th District does a good job community policing the district while on duty, but the district does not currently have a “dog shift” operating between the hours of 12am – 6am, with the exception of on- and off-duty police presence on Friday and Saturday nights from 12am – 3am.

**We need to make it a place where not only is it clean and more aesthetically attractive, but there’s a presence of people who are keeping it clean so that others know about it and talk about it, too.**

- DDD Commissioner

**I worry about my staff, my team, saying the wrong thing to a homeless person or using an incorrect action that provokes one, because they’re not trained to handle those things.**

- Hospitality Representative



## IMPROVE AND MAINTAIN INFRASTRUCTURE

Downtown has improved in 30 years. The area has a Town Square, a greenway, a collection of award-winning greenspaces, walking paths on the levee, and pocket parks. Stakeholders expressed that the area also needs:

- To be kept up (holes in the sidewalks, for example) and beautified
- Enhanced lighting to make the area more pleasing and to improve safety at night when too many people are afraid of walking outside
- More parks/greenspaces for residents and visitors
- Mobility improvements, with consideration for turning one-ways into two-ways, cycling paths and, particularly, improving Government Street for safety and appearance as it’s a gateway to Downtown.

According to survey respondents, the top three desired improvements for Downtown are:

1. More places to socialize
2. Enhanced lighting
3. Improved mobility and parking

**There is a problem with routine maintenance, and although signage may be redone and look good initially, it is not consistently maintained and becomes weathered over time.**

- DDD Commissioner

## CONNECTIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS: NICHOLSON AND GOVERNMENT STREET

Several people offered ideas for Baton Rouge that have recently become popular among leaders nationally for connecting Downtown with surrounding communities. The goal would be to build an urban core that is inclusive, connected, and vibrant. The DDD has made significant efforts in this regard with the Downtown Greenway, but more opportunities could be explored and/or enhanced with other initiatives including Bus Rapid Transit, Florida Corridor Plan, interstate expansion, etc.

Specifically, the DDD should consider partnering with organizations redeveloping Nicholson Drive to LSU, Government Street in Mid City, and in South Baton Rouge to ensure the connections to Downtown are seamless and accessible to all. The timing might be right to look at these connections and gaps: Mid City is thriving, Baton Rouge-based Commercial Properties has bought 40 acres on Nicholson Drive, and LSU Athletics is expected to invest hundreds of millions near campus for new facilities that might include other uses. The University/City Park Lakes project should benefit the entire area, but particularly South Baton Rouge.



CAPITALIZE ON DOWNTOWN’S ASSETS

THE RIVERFRONT

Most stakeholders said the DDD should collaborate to build on the riverfront. The riverfront is seen as an area that, if transformed, would spark pride and change the course of the parish. Areas for development include Riverfront Plaza, the two vacant blocks on the river, the dilapidated warehouse across from the Hilton, the batture near Hollywood Casino, and about 40 acres north of the casino. Also, the River Center needs to be upgraded and should consider a new convention hotel.

I think that we are not taking enough advantage of the riverfront.

- DDD Commissioner

What’s our waterfall? The Mississippi River.

- Retail Business Owner  
*(in reference to revitalization efforts in Greenville, SC, that capitalized on a waterfall as a centerpiece)*

There’s 40 acres of land available on the riverfront. That’s huge.

- Allied Organization Representative

THIRD STREET

Research participants offered a number of ideas/desires for Third Street, including filling the empty storefronts and adding a festival that highlights the street. They want to see beautification efforts on Third as well. Whenthe Blues Festival and other such events happen, they said utilize Third Street for performance stages and find creative ways to encourage pedestrian traffic and mobility up and down the corridor.

During Spanish Town, Third Street is packed. New Orleans has Freret Street and its festival. We could have a Third Street Festival. It’s something that could lead to more business.

- DDD Commissioner

DOWNTOWN EAST

Downtown East is a concern and an opportunity, and should be a priority for the DDD. The area is low-lying and needs more mixed-income housing. A plan for the area is warranted.

There’s just got to be a ton of thought put into what’s going on in Downtown East and the types of developments.

- DDD Commissioner

The assets are there, the buildings are there. How can we take what’s there and add to it.

- Developer  
*(on creating an arts district in Downtown East and Mid City)*

STRENGTHEN NEIGHBORHOODS

Residents want to activate Downtown neighborhoods through programs and the redesign of Government Street, a barrier that is dangerous to pedestrians and divides Beauregard Town. They want intentional and regular communication and see benefit in promoting Downtown to the parish. They also support stronger connections between Downtown and neighboring communities, emphasizing collaboration and connectivity to build the urban core.

WORK WITH THE CITY-PARISH

The City-Parish must prioritize Downtown. Tactics that could be considered include:

- Leading/partnering on planning initiatives/needs  
*(Note: Some or all of these could be combined)*
  - » Plan Baton Rouge Phase III – Focus on connecting Downtown to surrounding communities
  - » Housing Plan
  - » Riverfront Plan
  - » Transportation Plan (on-street parking, one-way conversions, etc.)
- Dedicating parking meter revenue to the DDD
- Increasing police presence for safety at night
- Policies to encourage development or sale of vacant/blighted lots
- Streamlined processes to make development less expensive and quicker
- Passage and enforcement of codes that lead to better maintenance of Downtown buildings
- Dedicating funding to the maintenance of Downtown

The City-Parish should prioritize funding for Downtown initiatives and make the area a keystone for the parish.

- DDD Commissioner

The City-Parish should dedicate more money to Downtown and pay more attention to the area.

- DDD Commissioner



GET MORE RESOURCES

The DDD does not have enough resources to employ the people and fund the projects needed to proceed with the ambitious goals and expectations placed on the organization. As a priority, the DDD must secure more funding.

With **existing funds**, hire:

- A full-time marketing professional to promote Downtown and to share the good news and events in Downtown, bringing more people and businesses to the area.
- A Development Project Director to oversee the quality-of-life projects the DDD initiates following the recommendations of master plans and this strategic plan. This position would also manage the various programs the DDD pursues with allied organizations and Downtown stakeholders to promote the district.

With **future funds**, hire:

- An economic development specialist to oversee more housing and businesses in the District. This professional could, among other things, create incentive packages and development toolkits, work with the City-Parish to make development more efficient, and collaborate with the marketing specialist to promote Downtown.

**The DDD needs to find more resources to build staff. One potential source is the State of Louisiana... The money should be an unrestricted line item in the annual state budget.**

- *Allied Organization Representative*

**The DDD doesn’t have enough resources, and salaries for positions are too low.**

- *DDD Commissioner*

This Strategic Plan was adopted by the Downtown Development District Commission on September 12, 2024. It was developed and published for the DDD by LaFargue. For more information, visit [lafargue.co](http://lafargue.co)







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