

DDD Commission Meeting
April 13, 2021 8:00 a.m.
Via Zoom Video Conference

In accordance with Executive Proclamations JBE 2020-30 and 2020-33, issued by Governor John Bel Edwards on March 16, 2020 and March 22, 2020, respectively, this notice shall serve as a certification of the Downtown Development District's inability to otherwise operate in accordance with the Louisiana Open Meetings Law due to a lack of a quorum as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

This meeting will be available for viewing by the general public on Zoom using the information below. Public comments on any of the items may be submitted via email to ddd@brla.gov, or via the Zoom platform.

Meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88156587073>

Attending: Melanie Montanaro-Chairwoman, Eric Dexter-Vice Chairman, Jude Melville-Treasurer, Prescott Bailey-Secretary, Erin Monroe Wesley, Patrick Michaels, Scott Hensgens

Absent: None

Others in Attendance: Karron Alford, Timothy Boone, Mary Jane Marcantel, Whitney Sayal, Lauren Lambert-Tompkins, Caitie Burks, Lauralyn Maranto, Paul Arrigo, Aaron Mollura, Paulina Tavera, John Snow, Kevin Broussard, Serena Pandos, Elizabeth Thomas, Kristen Mosbrucker, Mike Petty, Sgt. T.C. Laim, John Kaufman, Darlene Rowland, James Curtis Daniel Stetson, Allison Crump, Cheri Soileau, Ryan Holcomb, Mary Durusau, Deanna Narveson, Renee Chatelain, Stephen Long, Bryce Benzine, Jeannie Magdefrau, Rosehn Gipe, Caroline Byrne, Gary Black, Ben Blackwell, Ellie Brown, Elizabeth Walker, Rae'ven Jackson, William Cress, Melissa Parmelee, Frances Lee, Bubba Cashio, Melony Fields, David Rhymes, Murial Hall, Chris Nichols, Susie Anders, Kelsea McCrary, Shane Kirkpatrick, Ashley Montagnino, C Coleman, Mike Bruce, Melanie Couvillon, Lauren Tompkins, Sarah Gardner, Casey Tate, Gabe Vicknair, Ryan Benton, Ute Cress

Chairwoman Melanie Montanaro welcomed and thanked everyone for joining the Downtown Development District Commission Zoom meeting. Ms. Montanaro stated the past couple of months have been very difficult for everyone, particularly for the DDD staff and thanked them for the continued hard work being done even though it has not been easy, and it is much appreciated. The staff has been thought about along with Davis Rhorer's family, his loss is one that everyone has felt in the downtown community. Davis was a very unique individual with great vision, foresight and endless enthusiasm and passion for his job and this city. All thoughts and prayers and patience are appreciated.

Ms. Montanaro stated that if there are any questions or comments during the zoom to email them to DDD@brla.gov or use the chat box on the zoom and they will be addressed at the end of the meeting.

1. Ms. Melanie Montanaro called the meeting to order.

Mr. Gabe Vicknair, Assistant Executive Director presented to the Board, via Zoom, a memorial video for the remembrance of Davis S. Rhorer. The video was prepared by Casey Tate, Development Project

Director. After the video, Mr. Vicknair stated that it just seems unreal, but we can all find comfort in seeing every day all the improvements around downtown and being reminded of Davis's legacy and spirit. The Metropolitan Council has on their agenda for Wednesday a resolution to rename City Hall Plaza to Davis S. Rhorer Plaza. A presentation will take place at the beginning of the council meeting @ 4:00 PM. A dedication ceremony will be planned on-site whenever the details are complete. Ms. Montanaro requested the memorial video be placed on the DDD website for others to view and asked past Chairman, Scott Hensgens if he would like say a few words on behalf of the Board.

Mr. Scott Hensgens echoed the words of Mr. Vicknair, it just seems unreal, he still feels Davis's presence and it doesn't feel that he is gone. He stated Davis was as warm as any person he has known in many years, which is probably why he was so good at his job. Mr. Hensgens thanked Ms. Montanaro for her leadership during this time; it's not easy to be the Chair of a board when you lose your leader like this. Ms. Montanaro has done an excellent job and it is very much appreciated. Mr. Hensgens addressed the staff stating, Davis has always been proud of his staff and they have been a rock to everybody, not only the Board, but also to the downtown community. Mr. Hensgens stated all Davis wanted was to make downtown Baton Rouge better, he never sought credit or a pat on the back. There could not have been a more fitting video paying tribute to a man who spent his life and professional career trying to make downtown better and succeeding along the way.

2. Ms. Melanie Montanaro declared a quorum.

3. Ms. Erin Monroe Wesley moved to approve the agenda, Mr. Scott Hensgens seconded and the agenda was approved.

4. Ms. Erin Monroe Wesley moved to approve the January 12, 2021 minutes, Mr. Scott Hensgens seconded and the minutes were approved.

5. Board Action – There was none

6. Board Discussion – Ms. Melanie Montanaro updated the Board on the Executive Director transition. Mr. Davis Rhorer has been the first and only Director the DDD has had since its inception in 1987. The Commission takes its responsibility very seriously and wants to be certain they move forward with intention and transparency as they consider the steps before them. The Board's priorities will be first, to appoint an Interim Executive Director and secondly conduct a search for a new Director. Ms. Montanaro has asked the Parish Attorney for an opinion for clarification as to who the appointing authority for the DDD is and the appropriate procedures there are to follow to name an interim director. Once an opinion is rendered, Ms. Montanaro will call an Executive Committee Meeting of the board at that time. Notice will be given for that meeting, pursuant to the open meeting laws. One consideration is to form a special committee to coordinate the search for a new director, until that time Mr. Gabe Vicknair, Assistant Executive Director is performing all the daily operations of the office and serving as de facto executive director.

7. Governmental Issues: Current COVID19 Orders – Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission, via PowerPoint, on the new COVID19, Phase III guidelines. Mr. Vicknair noted that the restrictions have laxed somewhat, bars and restaurants are seeing an increase of customers and COVID numbers seem to be improving on a daily basis. There are some plans in the fall for live events to begin in the downtown area.

- Lifted occupancy limit on bars, restaurants, salons, gyms and casinos
- Large venues and reception halls are capped at 50% capacity limit
- Outdoor events will have a 50% capacity limit
- No statewide limitation on when bars and restaurants can serve alcohol
- Under 21 cannot enter a bar
- Bars can only provide service at socially distanced seats

8. Update from previous Board meeting: There were no updates.

9. Development Initiatives

A. Developments Underway:

- **1 River Mark Centre** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the renovations of 1 River Mark Centre (south tower) and a rendering of the proposed renovations. The renovations will include redevelopment into a mixed-use development with high-end residential units, office and ground floor retail; some demo work has begun. Gary Black with Wampold Companies is scheduled for next month’s meeting with some updates on timelines and details to share with the board.
- **River Center Theatre** – The Commission viewed via PowerPoint, images of the River Center Theatre currently under construction, along with the River Center Theatre Plaza scheduled to be completed by August 2021. The Plaza will house Mestrovic Court in which the four Mestrovic sculptures will be placed, it will be a true sculpture garden. Along with some new plantings, existing planters will be reused to help beautify the area in order to utilize the space for events. Views of the interior of the theatre show a center isle for improving ADA accessibility and circulation as a whole.
- **Cary Saurage Community Art Center** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center, currently under renovation. The construction is to be completed in the summer of 2021 and will house the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge. In addition to the Arts Council’s administrative headquarters, it will house an art gallery, an artist co-op area, a recording studio, a black box theater and a rooftop terrace with views of the river and an enclosed room for meetings or workspace and for socially distant events. The Arts Council is located near other cultural attractions such as the River Center Theatre and the River Center Branch Library. DDD will be working on connecting all these areas together and having some common drop-offs to improve the pedestrian experience.

- **State National Building Acquisition** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the State National Buildings which were acquired by Watson Cohen, LLC; Jeremy Watson and Jarrett Cohen. Mr. Vicknair stated he met with Jarrett Cohen a few weeks ago to discuss the acquisition and their plans; they are not ready to announce any immediate plans at the moment. They are cleaning up and doing some repairs to the exterior and interior of the buildings for better marketing. All existing tenants will remain at this time, and plan on leasing the upper floors of the buildings.
- **Water Campus** – The Commission, via PowerPoint, photographs of the near completion of the Water Campus. Water Street nearing completion will open up the east/west corridor from Nicholson Drive over the railroad tracks down to River Road. The Main Square is an outdoor space that includes a water feature with a seating area for a nice park space, designed by Reich and Associates. 200 Water Street Residences, located in the center of the Water Campus has a total of 20 loft-style apartments, and are now leasing at 200waterstreetapartments.com River House Apartments, next to the Water Campus on Nicholson between LSU and downtown, is a mixed-use development offering 224 loft style apartments. Additionally, a 4-story office building is being converted into 42 loft style apartments; when combined with the Water Campus will have a total of 286 residential units. This area is referred to as Downtown South.

Mr. Vicknair noted that in the Downtown East area there are residential properties that are under construction, and or will be under construction for a total of 468 total units. Combine this area with the units in Downtown South and there is a total of 772 residential units, creating new neighborhoods

- **Elysian III** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the Elysian III development. These are residential apartments under construction, with a total of 42 units Downtown East; one of the buildings fronts on North Street and another on Spanish Town Road. These will be a mixture of workforce housing and market rent; Gulf Coast Housing Partnership is the developer for this project. This development is expected to be completed in the summer of 2021.
- **Valencia Park Apartments** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of Valencia Park Apartments in the Downtown East area located off of Spanish Town Road near the Spanish Road Park. The development will consist of 62 1-bedroom, 54 2-bedroom and 6 3-bedroom apartments, consisting of 110 residential units of which 80% of the units will be Government assisted.
- **Lotus Village** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, of an aerial map of where Lotus Village, a new senior housing development will be built. The 116-unit development will be located at Spanish Town Road and 16th Streets, and is aimed at low to moderate income

seniors. The development is a partnership between the East Baton Rouge Council on Aging and the Gulf Coast Housing Partnership in New Orleans.

- **Downtown East Bike Connection** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint a map outlining the housing developments in the Downtown East area and the proposed bike connection. Mr. Vicknair noted across the interstate from Downtown East is BREC’s Memorial Stadium, which they have plans for a 40-acre major sports complex consisting of 3 basketball courts, an indoor track. and will also be used as a staging area by FEMA during natural disasters. BREC is working on a bike pathway from Memorial Stadium to Southern University. The goal is to acquire access from these neighborhoods by improving the area with sidewalks and bike lanes through Memorial Stadium and into the downtown. BREC is proposing some major improvements in the Memorial Stadium area.
 - **St. James Episcopal Church** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the completed \$1 million renovations to St. James Episcopal Church, 205 Nth 4th Street. Renovations include enhancements to the landscaping on the street-front in addition to interior. In the interior, the original wood floors are now exposed, which have been covered in carpet for many years, and a new sprinkler system has been installed along with other renovations.
 - **Riverfront Lot Acquisition** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, image of a 1.3 Acre riverfront lot acquisition on River Road between Main and Laurel Streets by businessman and developer John Engquist. The cost of the property was about \$5.7 million. No concrete plans have been announced yet, however, possibly some residential and mixed-use development. Mr. Vicknair stated there may be some units available for purchase, there are not many apartments or condos available for purchase in the downtown area. The DDD is excited about the protentional for this development as a major catalyst for downtown development on the prominent riverfront lot.
 - **Hound Dogs Bar Acquisition** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, image of the acquisition of the Hound Dogs bar at the corner of Main and Seventh streets by Cornelius Quarels. He plans on renovating the building into a restaurant, lounge and rooftop bar totaling 1,460 square feet. The rooftop will feature an open-air deck with a shade structure with seating for about 28 people.
- B. Downtown Parking Meters** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, a photograph of the proposed downtown smart parking meters and kiosks. Mr. Vicknair stated, in February the council approved the resolution for the allocation of \$875,000 for the purchase of smart parking kiosks/meters. These will be a mix of single-spaced “lollipop” meters and also smart parking kiosks. The administration has selected a vendor, Flowbird, to provide and monitor the meters. Another measure passed by council was to raise the parking rate downtown from \$.50 per hour to \$1 per hour; the new rate will not go into effect until July1. The contract with Flowbird should be finalized in the next couple of weeks, they are still working on the final quantities of

the meters. Mr. Vicknair stated he has a meeting scheduled with the Traffic Engineer, Ingolf Partenheimer to finalize plans for the location of the kiosks/meters.

C. Hospitality and Tourism – Karron Alford, Director of Marketing and Technology with Visit Baton Rouge, updated the Commission on the comeback of tourism. Ms. Alford stated that the first time since March 2020, the numbers have started to incrementally increase. The riverboats are one of the first launches for this incremental increase. VBR is expecting to have approximately 100 riverboat dockings from March 2021 through the end of the year. Comparatively to last year, 145 dockings were cancelled with 7 boats that dock in Baton Rouge, compared to 2019 which had about 98 dockings. In 2021 boat dockings will continue to increase and an additional boat will be added in 2022.

Events that were held this year were the Louisiana Marathon in early March, LSU Purple and Gold gymnastics meet at the River Center, the LHSAA State Wrestling Tournament at the River Center, and the 2021 Baton Rouge Block Party- Volleyball Tournament at the River Center. A lot of events are beginning again and groups are coming in, a slow but steady start which has been anticipated. Also, a look ahead, July is predicted to be the peak travel month across the US for the leisure visitors. The Soul Food Festival is scheduled for late June, Live After Five is beginning in August and LASM extended their hours. The occupancy hotel rate in March for the downtown area is about 65%, which is good and the downtown businesses are very excited about the activity.

D. MLK Sculpture Renovation – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, photographs of the renovations of the Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial sculpture by Arthur Silverman. Sarah Gardner with Baton Rouge Area Foundation updated the Commission on the work being done. This past Tuesday there was re-dedication of the monument honoring Martin Luther King, Jr., Davis Rhorer was instrumental in part of this work. The sculpture was first installed in 1997 on the River Center Plaza and over the years the Louisiana climate has been harsh and taken a toll on the sculpture. The color of the sculpture, after being painted many times, transitioned from orange and blue to red and serene blue, completely out of the artists intent. This sculpture is only one of a few in the nation that honors Dr. King in an abstract way, this was groundbreaking in the late 90's to have such an abstract piece of art. Orange and blue on the color wheel are opposite colors of each other, and that was meant to reflect that. Despite our differences, this monument brings those together being a unifying monument to encourage us as a city to come together.

In 2017, the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the Mayor's Office, the Arts Council and many civic and business leaders began discussions in 2017 about restoring the sculpture. The COVID pandemic put the project on hold for a while, but regained steam in mid-2020. Art restorer Susie Anders headed up the project which began in February, 2021. Overall the restoration took about 10 weeks, weather delayed the time schedule. Ms. Gardner is thankful to have partnered with DDD during this restoration and encourages everyone to stop by engage with the artwork and take time for a moment of contemplation reflecting on Dr. King's legacy and teachings.

E. Riverfront Plaza, Phase II and III – Mr. Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on the Riverfront Plaza, Phase II which is a streetscape improvements project along River Road providing some shade trees and expansion of meadow plantings, in addition to some bump outs/islands to create a pedestrian friendly experience. The bids came in higher than expected, partially due to the increase in construction materials. The project was going to include a new pedestrian crossing with a refuge isle in the middle, however, will have to be included in a later phase. The plans have been updated and resubmitted to Architectural Services to be rebid. Everything else in the original plans, the streetscape improvements, parking islands, the tree plantings and meadow plantings are still included. Hopefully the project will begin in late spring as anticipated.

Riverfront Plaza, Phase III, under design with Carbo Landscape, will provide a shade structure at riverfront landing near the dock which will also be used for programming events, the area is underutilized, basically because it lacks shade. The shade structure will have microphone connections and speaker systems, allowing more programs to be scheduled. Carbo Landscape has begun their work and hope to have some additional concepts and renderings of the shade structure for the next meeting. \$150,000 of funding is available for this project once the design portion is completed.

F. Downtown Greenway/Public Parking – Mr. Gabe Vicknair showed the Commission, via PowerPoint, images of proposed construction and updated the status of following projects:

- **Louisiana Avenue Connection** – Final plans were submitted to DOTD and will bid in the spring of 2021. DDD will be meeting with DOTD next week to address the final comments to be addressed on the drawings. Hopefully this will be bid by June and construction beginning this summer. This is an important connection which serves as the connection from the Greenway on East Boulevard to the Government Street bike path. The Government Street bike path now stops at 13th Street and does not go under the interstate. This will allow to connect the Louisiana Avenue to tie into the Greenway while going under the interstate. Seating and other amenities will be included. Security lighting will be provided under the interstate structure and improve the area with striping, cameras, and decorative gateway lighting to make this a safe public option for parking.
- **Public Parking** – This project is to improve the public parking under I-110 between Louisiana Avenue and North Boulevard. An application has been submitted to the office of Community Development for a HUD grant, to assist with funding the public parking however, we weren't afforded the grant for the public parking. The HUD money would have been used with the funds already allocated for gateway entrances for decorative lighting. Funds for the public parking will be discussed with the administration, possibly through MOVEBR. The public parking area is important, especially now with events beginning and for the service industry employees. DDD is moving forward with the decorative lighting of the gateway enhancements. A contract is in place with WHLC Architecture, and they have submitted a conceptual lighting design for the area. Funds are available from state sales tax rebates dedicated to

riverfront improvements for riverfront gateways. \$100,000 is available to light Louisiana Avenue and North Boulevard.

- **5th and 6th Street Bike Paths** – Traffic Engineering agreed to work with DDD to install the sharrow bike lanes along 5th & 6th, the markings were installed a few months ago. A traffic study was proposed to be conducted by Traffic Engineering to install the full bike lanes. However, the study has been placed on hold until the summer due to COVID, mainly due to number of people working downtown right now. Once more employees return to work downtown, a study will be done. In addition, the Traffic Engineering Department has purchased a striping machine which will make work such as this much more affordable since they will be doing the work in-house. Hopefully, this project will be completed by fall.

G. New Business - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of current projects, Mr. Casey Tate briefed the Commission.

- **Social Coffee, 728 North Street**– Mr. Tate welcomed Dillon Farrell to the downtown area. Social Coffee is located in the suite next to Geaux Ride and the YMCA, construction is expected to take place this summer. Mr. Farrell is excited to be moving in a brick and mortar business, which launched as a pop-up coffee cart two years ago.
- **Loadstar, 803 Main Street** – Mr. Tate welcomed Loadstar, a plant and energy logistics company, to the downtown area. Loadstar opened in January of this year and full interior renovations and painting to the exterior have been completed.
- **City Club, Kevin Sassano** – Mr. Tate welcomed Kevin Sassano, the new General Manager for City Club.

10. Events - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images for the following events. Mr. Casey Tate briefed the Commission and stated events are returning to the downtown area. Outdoor events are still taking place, including the popular Yoga on the Lawn every Thursday which has about 30-50 people in attendance. Happy's Running Club is every Tuesday, rain or shine. There has been some interest in getting Busking on Third started up with musicians playing along 3rd Street and bars are beginning to book live music. There has been increased interest in people hosting events and getting on the calendar for the summer and fall. All events still have to be submitted to opensafely.la.gov to be approved and have approval from the Mayor's office to use the public spaces.

- **Preserve Louisiana / Old Governor's Mansion** – Open for self-guided museum tours
- **Manship Theatre** – Sunset on the River, Outdoor Concert Series on the 4th floor River Terrace
- **LSU MOA** – Now on view: The Art of Seat, 200 Years of American Design. First free Sunday is May 2nd, free every Friday 5:00PM – 8:00PM
- **Capitol Park Museum** – Free admission every third Thursday
- **Old State Capitol** – Downtown Bird Walk, May 8th 8:00AM
- **River Center Events** – Hosting sporting events and high school graduations; limit at 50% capacity
- **LASM** – Art After hours with artist Eva Lee, April 22 @ 5:30PM
- **LASM** – New expanded hour, Thursday-Friday 9:30AM-2:00PM; Saturday 9:30AM-5:00PM

Sunday 10:00 AM-5:00 PM

- **USS KIDD – Warrior Yoga**, Wednesday @ 6:30pm/Ship and Museum open daily 9:30AM – 3:30PM
- **Baton Rouge Arts Market and Red Stick Farmers Market** –Saturday, May 1, 2021 at 5th & Main Streets

11. Ongoing Projects:

- **Downtown Business Association** - Lauren Lambert-Tompkins announced Live After Five will return this summer beginning August 20 thru November 5. Some of the bands playing will be Cowboy Mouth, Wayne Toups, Rebirth Brass Band, Chris LeBlanc, Phat Hat and After 8, more will be released in the near future. DBA is working with City Hall and DDD to ensure a safe event, there will be vendors and other elements as in the past, however a little different. Please contact Lauren at lauren@downtownbr.org with any questions. DBA is also working on launching a new website before Live After Five starts up, a new resource to better promote all the partners, businesses and their events. The Downtown Business Association will be having board elections coming up in June, if you are interested in serving on the DBA board, please contact Lauren.

Lauren mentioned the DBA has also lost a very valuable board member, Eric Carnegie, who passed away the same week Davis passed, it's been a very difficult time for the downtown area. Eric was a downtown business owner who owned many bars and restaurants. He loved live music and was probably in some sort of involvement behind the scenes. His is very dearly missed and there is no replacing him.

- **BREDA** – Darlene Rowland stated she was at the Tuesday market at the Main Library on Goodwood. Red Stick Farmers Market is still held every Saturday from 8:00AM – 12:00PM and if it's raining, it'll be moved into the garage. Strawberry season is in full swing, strawberry jams and many other Louisiana strawberry products are available. In addition, Main Street Market is open Monday-Saturday every day for lunch with a new coffee shop, Southern Coffee.

12. Correspondence – Mr. Gabe Vicknair stated there was no correspondence on which to report. Mr. Vicknair thanked the entire downtown community for reaching out to the DDD staff members and offering their condolences, support and assistance. It has been a tremendous response and is very much appreciated.

Ms. Melanie Montanaro thanked everyone for attending the virtual meeting this morning. Ms. Montanaro asked that everyone please continue to keep Davis's and Eric's families in their thoughts and prayers.

13. Meeting Adjourned – Mr. Scott Hensgens moved to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Erin Monroe Wesley seconded and the meeting was adjourned.