

DDD Commission Meeting
December 8, 2020, 8:00 a.m.
River Center Branch Library, 250 North Boulevard

Attending: Scott Hensgens, Melanie Montanaro, Jude Melville, Eric Dexter, Prescott Bailey

Absent: Erin Monroe Wesley, Madeline Brown,

Others in Attendance: Davis Rhorer, Holly Duchmann, Bubba Cashio, Kyle Huffstickler, Bryan Jones, Suzette Crocker, Rosehn Gipe, Park McEnery, Gordon McLeod, Aaron Molwa, Dwana Williams, Mary, Durursau, Serene Pandor, James Avault, Andre Boudreaux, John O Hearin, Montana Mercer, Tonnie Beatty, Eric Carnegie, Hamilton Shaw Joseph Furr, Tara Wicker, Barbara Freiberg, Melinda Kyzar, Chris Nichols, Cheri Souileau, Brandon Songy, Holly Duchmann, David Rhymes, Brooke Goodrich, Reed Ricard, Rhonad Ruffino, Jay Gaudet, Karron Alford, Casey Tate, Gabe Vicknair, Ryan Benton, Ute Cress, Ashton Breeding

1. Mr. Scott Hensgens called the meeting to order.

2. Mr. Scott Hensgens declared a quorum.

3. Mr. Eric Dexter moved to approve the agenda and the September 8, 2020 minutes, Ms. Melanie Montanaro seconded and the agenda & minutes were approved.

Mr. Davis Rhorer thanked the Library for allowing the DDD to hold their December meeting there.

4. Board Action – There was no board action.

Governmental Issues: Current COVID 19 Orders – Mr. Davis Rhorer briefed the Commission on the current COVID19 phase. Currently Baton Rouge is at Phase II - Restaurants are limited to 50% of their indoor seating; bars are closed for indoor consumption, but open for outdoor consumption at tables only and at 25%, retail businesses at 50%; indoor gatherings are limited to 25% capacity or up to 75 individuals; outdoor gatherings at event/reception centers are limited to 25% capacity or 150 individuals when strict physical distancing is not possible.

Mr. Rhorer stated this past Friday, December 4th, the city held a virtual tree lighting, which is the city's oldest tradition, with a few carolers from the Symphony.

5. Development Initiatives – Developments Underway –Mr. Rhorer briefed the Commission on the following current projects underway:

- A. **2020 Accomplishments** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, a recap of 2020, which includes new restaurants, riverfront developments and awards. The following accomplishments have occurred this year; The Vintage, which is hosting our breakfast today, opened, Batch 13 Restaurant opened, the Greenway, Phase II in front of St. Agnes Church, DDD's tax renewal passed with 78%, the Rotary Sculpture, the renovation of Riverfront Plaza, working on Riverfront Plaza Phase II and the Central Greenway won a major international award for design. Mr. Rhorer said many people were involved with these projects and thanked those involved, including Mr. Bubba Cashio, Director of Department of Building and Grounds with the City and some of his staff who are in attendance.

- B. Downtown Development/Public Projects** – Mr. Rhorer showed the Commission an image of a spreadsheet of over 50 public projects and initiatives underway that the DDD is currently working on. Mr. Rhorer thanked Gabe Vicknair for organizing them in a spreadsheet in order for the staff to be able to check on of the status of each one.
- C. River Center Theatre** – The Commission viewed via PowerPoint, images of the River Center Theatre currently under construction, along with the River Center Theatre Plaza under the direction Bubba Cashio of Building and Grounds. The project encompasses a new loading zone area on St. Louis Street. The Plaza will house the four Mestrovic sculptures along with some new plantings. Some of the existing planters will be reused to plant bamboo to help beautify the area of the Mestrovic sculptures in order to utilize the space for events.
- D. Cary Saurage Community Art Center** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center (formerly the “Triangle Building”) 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 an enclosed room for meetings or workspace. The terrace, which overlooks the downtown skyline and the Mississippi River, will be available to the public for events. The Arts Council is located near other cultural attractions such as the River Center Theatre and the Library. DDD will be working on connecting all these areas together and having some common drop-offs.
- E. Water Campus on Oklahoma Street** – Mr. Davis Rhorer showed the Commission, via PowerPoint, photographs of the near completion of the Water Campus on Oklahoma and Terrace Streets. This will open up the east/west corridor from Nicholson Drive to River Road over the railroad tracks. 200 Water Street is the residential development of the Water Campus, housing 24 units which they are now leasing. The Main Square is an outdoor space that includes a water feature with a seating area designed by Reich and Associates. On one side of the Main square is residential, and the other is commercial development which houses Stantec.
- F. River House** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint images of River House, a mixed use development next to the Water Campus on Nicholson between LSU and downtown being converted into 42 loft style apartments.
- G. The Elysian III Apartments** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint images of the Elysian III development. Mr. Davis Rhorer stated these are residential apartments under construction, with a total of 42 units in the Downtown East area. 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.
- H. Valencia Park Apartments** – Mr. Davis Rhorer showed the Commission images, via PowerPoint, of Valencia Park Apartments in the Downtown East area. It consists of 122 residential units 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, of which 80% of the units will be Government assisted.

- I. Lotus Village** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, of an aerial map of where Lotus Village, a new senior housing development will be built and is scheduled to go before the Planning Commission in January 2021. 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. With the development of Lotus Village, Valencia Park and Elysian I, II & III, there will be a total of 468 residential units, basically creating a new neighborhood in the Downtown East area. Mr. Rhorer recognized Councilwoman Tara Wicker and thanked her for involvement in regards to all the residential units in this area. Mr. Rhorer noted across the interstate from these developments is BREC’s Memorial Stadium and plans for a 40 acre sports complex.

- J. Belle of Baton Rouge** – Mr. Davis Rhorer showed the Commission images of the Belle of Baton Rouge which was recently purchased by Casino Queen, a subsidiary out of St. Louis. Mr. Rhorer stated he, the Mayor’s Office and Visit Baton Rouge will be on a conference call tomorrow with the new owners.

- K. River Park Property** – Mr. Gordon McLeod and Park McEnery with The McEnery Company (Commercial Real Estate) updated the Commission on the status on 24 acres of the Pete Clements property. Mr. McEnery said there’s a “tug-of-war” over the highest and best use site between developers who are eyeing it for an amphitheater and those who want to use it for industrial purposes. The property directly abuts the Hollywood Casino property which will be undergoing approximately \$25 million worth of renovations and additions for landside improvements. They have been marketing River Park toward building a venue (amphitheater) for live music on the site. Mr. McEnery stated there are no amphitheaters in the state of Louisiana and the closest one is in Brandon, Mississippi. Renderings were shown of how an amphitheater could look and said they’ve gotten pretty responsive calls and e-mails.

Mr. Davis Rhorer stated this is an incredible piece of property, prime for development, which does not flood and has a slight bluff above the river. In addition, many years ago a four lane underpass was built. He would also love to see some residential development on the property.

Mr. Rhorer recognized Representative Barbara Freiberg in attendance and thanked her for joining us this morning

- L. CATS Strategic Plan Survey** – Ms. Cheri Soileau, Director for Planning and Program Development at CATS informed the Commission, the Capital Area Transit System will revive a trolley program for Downtown Baton Rouge next spring and is asking the public to fill out a survey on their website. Ms. Soileau stated the Plank-Downtown-Nicholson Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is continuing to move forward. Cooperative endeavor agreements were signed by state and local officials last month, pledging cooperation to fund the design, construction and operation of the \$53.6 million project.

Mr. Bryan Jones, HNTB Engineering, stated officials are working to merge the Department of Transportation and Development projects for Florida Boulevard and Plank Road into the BRT project. The design for the BRT will take about a year. Construction of areas on Florida Boulevard and Plank Road will begin in early 2022. The BRT should be operational in 2024 and feature 44 stops along with a new transfer center on Airline Highway, near the Our Lady of the Lake emergency room. On the southern end of the city it will go all the way to the LSU Stadium.

Ms. Soileau stated that these routes will be operated by electric buses and CATS is in the process of procuring 35 electric buses. Beginning in January 2021, CATS will have a virtual monthly Q&A session, most likely on Facebook.

M. MLK Sculpture Restoration – Mr. Davis Rhorer briefed the Commission on the proposed restoration of the MLK Sculpture. This is a joint venture between the Baton Rouge Area foundation and the Arts Council raising private funds to restore the sculpture. Mr. Rhorer stated the city and DDD is involved. A master plan has been presented to the Art in Public Places Advisory Committee (APPAC) which will involve a renovation and also a reshaping for more green area, seating and shade for a reflective space.

N. First Presbyterian Church Renovations - Mr. Joey Furr, Landscape Architect briefed the Commission on the landscaping improvements and outdoor renovations under construction at First Presbyterian Church on North Boulevard. The construction includes security fencing for the pre-school, to develop the area out to the street, redo the handicap ramps, reduce the travel lane, and some other beautification projects. Mr. Davis Rhorer asked Mr. Furr to be sure that the crosswalks connect to the Greenway. The construction should be complete in a couple of months.

O. Mayor’s Homelessness Prevention Coalition – Mr. Davis Rhorer briefed the Commission on the update of the Mayor’s Homelessness Coalition. The Baton Rouge Police Department was awarded a \$721,000 grant to help fight homelessness. This will allow the BRPD to hire Officers that have special training and Case Workers to work with the homeless to help place them in mental health facilities. This is a 3 year grant which started in October that will go through 2023.

Downtown Programming – Festival of Lights – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the lighting of the Christmas tree, “Festival of Lights”, which was held last Friday night, December 4th. Mr. Davis Rhorer thanked Mr. Kyle Huffstickler and his staff for coordinating and working on the lighting of the Christmas tree and other Christmas decorations along North Boulevard and Town Square.

Mr. Rhorer showed images of individuals engaged in a Pop-up Barre class on Sunday morning, Happy’s Running Club on Tuesday evenings at 6:15 and Jolie Pearl Yoga Club on Thursday evenings at 6:30 in North Boulevard Town Square.

Downtown Greenway / Public Parking – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, photographs of the Downtown Greenway, Louisiana Avenue Connection. Mr. Gabe Vicknair informed the Commission that final plans have been submitted to DOTD and should be bid in the spring of 2021.

Mr. Vicknair stated the DDD is working on another project for improvements for the area under Interstate 110 to reclaim the parking spaces for free public parking; there are over 400 spaces available. There is an additional 150 spaces between Louisiana Avenue and North Boulevard, Mr. Vicknair stated this will be the first phase of the project which will include lighting the gateways at Louisiana Avenue and North Boulevard, security lighting, cameras and other amenities to make this a safe public option for parking; WHLC Architecture has a submitted conceptual lighting design for the area. The cost estimate of the project for the security lighting, re-striping, wayfinding signage and the colorful gateways is about \$368,000. There are funds available from state sales tax rebates dedicated to riverfront improvements for riverfront gateways. Those funds will be used and will contribute about \$147,000 and DDD has requested

\$220,000 from the Office of Community Development for a HUD grant application. The request was submitted last week and should have a quick turnaround, possibly by mid-January.

Phase IV North Link to Memorial Stadium - Mr. Ryan Benton briefed the Commission and showed a PowerPoint presentation on another phase of the Downtown Greenway, the North Link to Memorial Stadium which includes pedestrian and bicycle (multi-use path) improvements from 5th Street and Spanish Town to Memorial Stadium via State Capitol Drive, Arsenal Park and Capitol Access Road and on to Memorial Stadium. A Transportation Enhancement Program Application was submitted on December 16 with a project estimate of \$586,400 - (\$390.9K TAP / \$195.4 LOCAL)

New Business - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, photographs of current projects. Mr. Rhorer briefed the Commission on the following projects:

- **Outside Stimuli**– Mr. James Curtis will open a Holiday Pop-Up shopping experience later this week. They have renovated the two front windows to be utilized as transaction counters to allow it to be a touchless interaction, without customers having to go into the store. This is the old DDD Office located at 227 Florida Street.
- **Capitol Grocery (formerly Spanish Town Market)** – Mr. Hamilton Shaw, owner, briefed the Commission on the changes being made. They changed the name of Spanish Town Market back to the original name, Capitol Grocery. Ms. Annie Hains, formerly with Christina’s is the manager and they wanted to make the business more of a grocery store for the neighborhood and less of a restaurant; however they will still offer a small breakfast and lunch menu.
- **Rios Tacos and Tequila** – Mr. Eric Carnegie briefed the Commission on he and Chad Hughes plan on opening a Mexican restaurant, Rio Tacos and Tequila, on the ground floor of the building, beneath City Bar located 333 Third Street. The menu will consist of 8 different tacos, fajitas, quesadillas, 4 different frozen machines, numerous tequilas and brunch on Saturday and Sunday.

8. Events - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images for the following events. Mr. Casey Tate briefed the Commission on the following events and stated events are returning to the downtown area.

- 2021 Bandito Fest at Galvez Plaza – June 26-27, Live Music
- 2020 Virtual Red Stick Revery – December 31, North Boulevard Town Square
- Manship Theatre –Private Movie Parties: Up to 50 people \$500 – Pick your movie
- Manship Theatre – Live Concert -9th Annual Cool Winter Nights, Hot Jazz, River Terrace, December 15, 7:30PM
- Manship Theatre – “It’s a Wonderful Life” (1946) December 13, 2:00PM
- LSU MOA – First Free Sunday
- Preserve Louisiana / Old Governor’s Mansion – Ghost Stories and Rituals
- Capitol Park Museum – Museum Open Tuesdays – Saturdays 9:00AM – 4:00PM
- Old State Capitol – Louisiana’s Lion Hearted Ladies: Championing the Right to Vote thru Dec 18
- River Center Events – Ice Skating on the River – Tickets on sale now thru January 3
- LASM –A Very Merry Museum, Saturday, December 12th @ 9:30AM
- USS KIDD – Warrior Yoga, Wednesday @ 6:30pm/Ship and Museum open daily 9:30AM – 3:30PM
- Baton Rouge Arts Market –December 12 and 19
- Red Stick Farmers Market – December 12 and 19 8:00AM – 12:00PM

9. Ongoing Projects – There was no information to report

10. Correspondence – There was no information to report.

11. Public Comment – Mary Durusau with the Old State Capital announced that Sadie Joseph Roberts’ son Jason Roberts and her daughter are now operating the Baton Rouge African American Museum. They have worked with the city and have negotiated a Cooperative Endeavor Agreement for a new building location at 805 St. Louis and will go before the city council tomorrow. If you would like to sign a “Letter of Support” you can do so by going to the website brla.gov/councilcomment.

Meeting Adjourned – Mr. Scott Hensgens moved to adjourn the meeting, Mrs. Melanie Montanaro seconded and the meeting was adjourned.