

DDD Commission Meeting
January 12, 2021 8:00 a.m.
Hilton Baton Rouge Capitol Center, 201 Lafayette Street

Attending: Scott Hensgens, Melanie Montanaro, Jude Melville, Erin Monroe Wesley Eric Dexter, Prescott Bailey, Patrick Michaels

Absent: None

Others in Attendance: Davis Rhorer, Dr. Pamela Ravare Jones, Mysti Byrnes, Dwana Williams, Drake Helton, Gabriel Rice, Justin Lemoine, Jason Roberts, Carolyn Coleman, Melanie Couvillon, Jay Gaudet, Julie Spaht, Cheri Souileau, Aaron Mollwa, M.J. Marcantel, Darlene Adams Rowland, Caroline Byrne, Elise Arceneaux, Renard Thomas, David Rhymes, Jennifer Whittington, Timothy Boone, Casey Tate, Gabe Vicknair, Ryan Benton, Ute Cress

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

2. Mr. Scott Hensgens declared a quorum.

3. Ms. Erin Monroe Wesley moved to approve the agenda and the December 8, 2020 minutes, Ms. Melanie Montanaro seconded and the agenda & minutes were approved.

4. Board Action – Mr. Davis Rhorer addressed the Commission and stated new board members are being appointed today; the board members hold their office for a period of two years. Mr. Rhorer wanted to recognize and thank Mr. Scott Hensgens for his dedication and work as President of the DDD Commission during the past two years, 2019-2020. Mr. Rhorer pointed out projects during Mr. Hensgens tenure beginning with the DDD 5 year tax renewal, which passed with a 78% approval, the Greenway, Phase II, was recognized by the International Downtown Association (IDA) and won a national award, Riverfront Plaza rehabilitation, the Rotary Sculpture, and a host of housing developments, which is DDD’s number one priority in the masterplan. The housing developments include the Heron, The Elias and the Downtown East which is under construction. Mr. Hensgens also served as chairman on the Arts Council during the renovations of their new headquarters, the old “Triangle Building”. Also during his tenure as DDD Chairman, the location of LABI downtown, the construction of the Downtown River Center Library, murals and the Commission’s response to COVID that kept things going in the downtown area. Mr. Rhorer presented Mr. Hensgens with a plaque on behalf of the DDD Commission and staff as a token of appreciation for his service.

Mr. Rhorer introduced a new board member, Mr. Patrick Michaels who is the representative for Spanish Town. Mr. Michaels introduced himself and stated he is a landscape architect and is proud to be representing the Spanish Town area on the DDD Board and to be working with Davis and his staff.

Mr. Davis Rhorer presented the Commission the proposed slate of 2021 officers as follows: Melanie Montanaro, Chairman; Eric Dexter Vice Chairman; Jude Melville, Treasurer and Prescott Bailey, Secretary. **Mr. Scott Hensgens moved to adopt the nominees as presented, Ms. Erin Monroe Wesley seconded and the nominees were unanimously approved as presented.**

Mr. Davis Rhorer introduced and congratulated Ms. Carolyn Coleman as the new Metro Council Member for District 10. Ms. Coleman thanked everyone for opportunity to work with them and for the development in the downtown area. She lives in Beauregard Town, has seen the downtown grow and is excited for the opportunity to work to help.

5. Governmental Issues: Current COVID 19 Orders – Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission, via PowerPoint, on the new COVID Relief Bill.

- \$900 billion COVID-19 relief bill passed Dec. 21 by Congress
- Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, adds \$300 to extended weekly unemployment benefits, and provides more than \$300 billion in aid for small businesses.
- Ensures tax deductibility for business expenses paid with forgiven Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, provides fresh PPP funding, makes Sec. 501(c)(6) not-for-profit organizations eligible for loans for the first time.
- 20 billion to provide Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) Grants to businesses in low-income communities.
- Shuttered live venues, independent movie theaters, and cultural institutions will have access to \$15 billion in dedicated funding.
- \$12 billion will be set aside to help business in low-income and minority communities.

Mr. Vicknair pointed out there are many other line items in the relief bill. If anyone wants additional information, it can be viewed at sba.gov and more information is available on the DDD website at downtownbatonrouge.org, under COVID-19 Business and Community Resources.

6. Development Initiatives – Developments Underway — The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, photographs of current projects. Mr. Davis Rhorer briefed the Commission on the following projects:

- A. Downtown Development Continues**— Mr. Rhorer stated downtown has over 50 public projects and initiatives underway that the DDD is currently working on. There is a host of housing developments, Riverfront Plaza Phase II which will include a shade structure and exercise equipment, upgrades to the Rotary sculpture, transportation projects with CATS for the trolley and bus rapid transit, River Center Theatre and Plaza renovations, Nicholson Transfer and many others on the horizon, despite COVID.
- B. 2020 Development Yearbook** – Mr. Davis Rhorer stated the Commission had received a copy of the 2020 Yearbook, a recap of 2020, which includes new restaurants, riverfront developments and awards. Mr. Rhorer pointed out the yearbook is online at the DDD website, downtownbatonrouge.com on the homepage.
- C. Downtown River Center Library** – Mr. Rhorer stated that the River Center Library is achieving what was expected from the library, being utilized as a centerpiece for Town Square, even during COVID. The library is hosting socially distanced events such as the virtual New Year’s Eve event, the Mayor’s Inauguration, the Metro Council uses it for the public to assemble there to speak at council meetings and is hosting several other socially distanced events this year.
- D. 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 the end of April. 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 in order to utilize the space for events.

- E. 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 and will be available for socially distant 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.
- F. Downtown Trolley** – The Capital Area Transit System will revive a trolley program for downtown Baton Rouge this year. Mr. Davis Rhorer mentioned they were able to meet with Cheri Soileau, Director for Planning and Program Development at CATS, who is attendance today. CATS will be doing some rebranding using electric buses/shuttles, shorter wait times, real time tracker and updated wayfinding and notifications. Mr. Rhorer stated they are working with CATS to reduce wait times down to 8 minutes so all downtown and Capital Park employees can utilize the buses during the lunch hour with plenty of time to return to work. Another marketing strategy for the buses will be for the riverboats when they began docking again in Baton Rouge. The passengers can utilize the buses to get to downtown restaurants and attractions, it is estimated Baton Rouge will have approximately 150 boat stops a year.
- G. Bus Rapid Transit Route** - The Plank-Nicholson Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project will be the State’s first BRT line and will serve as a central spine to the region’s transit system. The nine-mile route will provide high-capacity transit service connecting North Baton Rouge, downtown, and the Louisiana State University (LSU) campus. There will be 5 downtown stops which the residents in north and south Baton Rouge can use the buses as a means of transportation to access the downtown area for work and leisure.
- H. Water Campus** – The Commission, via PowerPoint, photographs of the near completion of the Water Campus. The Main Square is an outdoor space that includes a water feature with a seating area, designed by Reich and Associates. Water Street will open up the east/west corridor from Nicholson Drive over the railroad tracks down to River Road. Terrace Street will create a whole area of mixed use development.
- I. Downtown Housing** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint images of housing under construction in the area referred to as Downtown South which has projects underway for a total of 286 residential units.
- **200 Water Street Residences**, located in the center of the Water Campus has a total of 20 loft-style apartments, 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. Mr. Rhorer stated DDD will be working to establish some wayfinding signage how to best connect the residents and businesses for walking and biking to the downtown area.

J. Downtown East Infill Development – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint images of the housing development in the Downtown East area. Mr. Davis Rhorer stated there are residential properties that are under construction, and or will be under construction for a total of 468 total units in Downtown East. Combine this area with the units in Downtown South and there is a total of 772 residential units, creating new neighborhoods. Mr. Rhorer 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. The goal is to acquire access from these neighborhoods by improving the area with sidewalks and bike lanes to Memorial Stadium and into the downtown area for basic services such as grocery and pharmacy.

- **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** – 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.
- **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.

K. River Mark Centre – Mr. Davis Rhorer briefed the Commission on the rebranding of the Chase North and South Towers to the River Mark Centre I & II. The rebrand will include redevelopment of the south tower into a mixed-use development with high-end residential units, office and ground floor retail.

L. River Front Casinos - The Commission, via PowerPoint, viewed images of the Belle of Baton Rouge and Hollywood Casino which were recently purchased by Casino Queen, a subsidiary out of St. Louis. Mr. Rhorer stated that he, the Mayor’s Office and Visit Baton Rouge met with the new owners, informing them about downtown Baton Rouge and what has been accomplished and future plans. Hollywood Casino is moving forward with the landside development and will be breaking ground shortly. The renovations and additions are to approximately 100,000 square feet and include a Shaquille O’Neal restaurant, Big Chicken.

M. River Park Property – Mr. Davis Rhorer briefed the Commission on the status on 24 acres of the River Park property adjacent to the Hollywood Casino. The McEnergy Company (Commercial Real Estate) updated the Commission last month on the status of the interest in the property. Mr. McEnergy 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. Mr. Davis Rhorer stated they have not gotten any additional information from the McEnergy Company and will keep the Commission updated.

N. Mayor's Homelessness Prevention Coalition – Dr. Pamela Ravare-Jones updated the Commission on the Mayor's Homelessness Prevention Coalition (HPC). Dr. Jones addressed three agenda items, 1) Pilot II Behavioral Health Outreach – Capital Area Recovery Program (CARP) Panhandling Survey; 2) Litter Signage and Panhandling Communication and 3) Future Best Practices. The panhandling survey consisted of 14 individuals in the 70816 area regarding ethnicity, veterans, out of state, in state, substance use, treatment and ages. Dr. Jones stated HPC has partnered with Capital Area United Way, DPW and State DOTD to set up a campaign to develop signage for public roadways regarding littering and panhandling. In collaboration with Capital Area United Way a website has been set up for donations at www.brhelps.org for those individuals who would like to make a contribution through non-profits to help with the homeless in an effort of safety. Dr. Jones stated HPC is researching a program, Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) being used in Colorado Springs, CO and Wichita KS, in which local law enforcement is being dedicated to work with the homeless. Another model HPC is looking at, being used in Bakersfield CA, is the Built for Zero program. Built for Zero is a movement of more than 80 communities committed to measurably ending homelessness, by finding affordable housing. HPC is working with a task force to help the Baton Rouge downtown homeless veterans, there are programs in place to help and assist veterans. Lastly, HPC will be hosting business roundtable discussions with local downtown businesses in finding solutions to help eradicate homelessness.

O. 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 project will also include a new pedestrian crossing with a refuge isle in the middle. The crossing will be a little closer to the exhibition hall entrance providing a safer access to cross the street and closer than crossing the pedestrian bridge by LASM. Mr. Jeff Carbo is finishing up the landscape design on this project. State sales rebate tax funding for riverfront improvements has been approved for this project in addition to some other resources. Mr. Vicknair stated hopefully construction will begin this spring. Riverfront Plaza, Phase III, under design with Carbo Landscape, will provide a shade structure at riverfront landing near the dock which will also be utilized for programing events.

Mr. Ryan Benton briefed the Commission on additional improvements and amenities for Phase III. Fitness stations are planned along the riverfront and Riverfront Plaza near the base of the levy, based upon approval of the Corp of Engineers and along the top of the levy path. These

fitness stations will be similar to those along the Downtown Greenway. High quality hand sanitizers will also be installed at the riverfront, the Downtown Greenway and Town Square encouraging people to use the outdoor spaces in the downtown area.

- P. Downtown Programming** – Mr. Casey Tate showed the Commission, via PowerPoint, images of events in that were held downtown. The Mayor hosted a virtual Red Stick Revelry on December 31, at the River Center Library dropping the “Red Stick” to celebrate ringing in the New Year. Mr. Tate stated it was a wonderful event and the live stream has over 50,000 views. DDD is continuing to plan other outdoor festivals for 2021.

Mr. Tate showed images of individuals engaged in weekly programs such as Happy’s Running Club on Tuesday evenings at 6:15 meeting at Town Square for social distancing. Jolie Pearl Yoga Club on Thursday evenings at 6:30 in North Boulevard Town Square and dinner afterwards. The Louisiana Marathon has been rescheduled from January to March 6 and 7. Sadly all downtown Mardi Gras parades have been cancelled.

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

- **Louisiana Avenue Connection** – Final plans were submitted to DOTD and will bid in the spring of 2021.
- **Public Parking** – An additional project is to improve the public parking under I-110 between Louisiana Avenue and North Boulevard. 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 during events and for the service industry. An application has been submitted to the office of Community Development for a HUD grant, and should have approval by the end of the month. There are funds available from state sales tax rebates dedicated to riverfront improvements for riverfront gateways. A contract is in place with WHLC Architecture and they have submitted a conceptual lighting design for the area.
- **Phase IV North Link to Memorial Stadium** - Another phase of the Downtown Greenway is the North Link to Memorial Stadium. This will include 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)

- R. BREADA** – Mr. Davis Rhorer introduced and welcomed Darlene Rowland, as the new Executive Director with BREADA. Mr. Rowland stated she has been working with BREADA for about 13 years now. She is thrilled to take the helm and looking forward to working with the DDD Commission and all the downtown partners. She wanted to point out that the Farmer’s Market is open every Saturday from 8-12 and Main Street Market is open Monday-Friday for breakfast and lunch.

- S. Baton Rouge African American Museum** – Jason Roberts and his sister, Angela Roberts-Machen assumed the operations of the museum since his mother’s tragic death last year. They

took over the museum with the hope to fulfill their mother's mission to preserve and celebrate black history. They have partnered with the City of Baton Rouge and Mayor Broome has been instrumental in securing a new location for the museum at 805 St. Louis. It has always been Ms. Sadie Joseph Roberts desire to locate the museum in the heart of downtown and bridge the gap between the communities.

T. New Business - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of current projects.

- **Nardfit/440 Third Street** – Mr. Renard Thomas opened a new fitness facility above Matherne's, formerly Cajun Fitness. Mr. Thomas plans on utilizing the downtown area for socially distanced healthy events. Showers, lockers and towel service are available; the hours of operation are from 5:00 am – 8:00 pm.
- **Cofe' Concepts/Main Street Market** – Ms. Darlene Rowland stated this new coffee shop will be opening inside of Main Street Market next month. The owner, Mr. Horatio Isadore, has another coffee shop in Scotlandville and Ms. Rowland stated they are excited about having a coffee shop once again in the Market.
- **Rio Tacos and Tequila** – Opening Friday January 15 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.

7. 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.

- Virtual BREW – Broadcast from the Downtown Library – January 19-21
- Preserve Louisiana / Old Governor's Mansion – Open for Museum Tours
- 2021 Bandito Fest at Galvez Plaza – June 26-27, Live Music
- Manship Theatre –Socially Distanced Spoof Night! – “Pretty in Pink”, Feb 12, 7:30 PM
- LSU MOA – *Southbound*: Photographs of and about the New South
Virtual Artist Talks – January 19, 21, 26 and 28, 5:30 PM
- Capitol Park Museum – On view now - Portraying the Past: Perspectives on American Indian Mounds in Louisiana
- Old State Capitol – Reopens January 19 - Virtual Presentation January 31, 3:00 PM “Louisiana's Orphan Train”
- River Center Events – Ice Skating on the River Recap – 172 sessions with 17,386 skaters
- LASM –Stargazing in the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium – Saturdays 10:00 am
- USS KIDD – Warrior Yoga, Wednesday @ 6:30pm/Ship and Museum open daily 9:30AM – 3:30PM
- Baton Rouge Arts Market –Saturday, February 7, 5th & Main Streets

9. Ongoing Projects – There was no information to report

10. Correspondence – There was no information to report.

11. Public Comment – Ms. Julia Spaht Admissions Director at St. James Episcopal Day School. The school has been downtown since 1948 and is the only private elementary and pre-school in Baton

Rouge. The grades are preschool (18 months) to grade 5 and is a two time national Blue Ribbon award winner. She has brochures and business cards available if anyone would like to take some back to work with them.

Ms. Mysti Byrnes with the Arts Council stated they are starting to have live events, the River City Jazz Masters Concerts Series on the 4th floor terrace of the Shaw Center beginning February 24.

Mr. Scott Hensgens thanked Mr. Rhorer for the plaque and gavel and all the kind words. Mr. Hensgens stated he wanted to place praise where it was due and thanked the DDD staff; the progress that has continued being made in the downtown area is testament of all their hard work and is he very appreciative.

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