

DDD Commission Meeting
June 15, 2021 8:00 a.m.
River Center Branch Library, 250 North Boulevard

Attending: Melanie Montanaro-Chairwoman, Eric Dexter-Vice Chairman, Jude Melville-Treasurer, Prescott Bailey-Secretary

Absent: Erin Monroe Wesley, Patrick Michaels, Scott Hensgens

Others in Attendance: Karron Alford, Mary Jane Marcantel, Mary Durusau, Dr. Pamela Jones, Lisa Nice, Leslie Charleville, Sgt. TC Lam, Todd Maulding, Anna Gasperecz, Brooke Goodrich, Brandon Songy, Taylor Jacobsen, Ryan Holcomb, Mysti Byrnes, Jason Langlois, Daniel Stetson, John Snow, Marcus Williams, Brandon Weber, Andre Boudreaux, Bart Sutton, David Rhymes, Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman, Justin Lemoine, Julia Evans, Chris Chandler, Cheri Soileau, Chris Nichols, Paul Agrrio, Aaron Mollura, Dr. Fry, Angela Smith, Gary Black, Murial Hall, Stephen Long, Bubba Cashio, Collin Lindrew, Shirley Bowler, James Avault, Gabe Vicknair, Ryan Benton, Ute Cress

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

2. Ms. Melanie Montanaro declared a quorum.

3. Mr. Eric Dexter moved to approve the agenda, Mr. Jude Melville seconded and the agenda was approved.

4. Mr. Eric Dexter moved to approve the May 11, 2021 minutes, Mr. Jude Melville seconded and the minutes were approved.

5. Board Action – None

6. Governmental Issues: Current COVID19 Orders – Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission, via PowerPoint, on the new COVID19 guidelines.

- The Governor lifted the statewide mask mandate
- Large venues and reception halls are at full capacity limit
- Outdoor events have NO capacity limits
- No statewide limitation on when bars and restaurants can serve alcohol

7. Update from previous Board meeting: Executive Director Transition - Ms. Melanie Montanaro updated the Board on the Interim Executive Director position. The Metropolitan Council approved the appointment of Gabe Vicknair as the Interim DDD Executive Director at the May 26th Metro Council

meeting. Ms. Montanaro stated the Commission is in the process to form a search committee to coordinate and conduct a search and interviews to fill the position of DDD Executive Director.

8. Development Initiatives

A. Developments Underway:

- **Downtown East Housing** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, a map outlaying the housing developments in the Downtown East area and images of the ongoing construction on the following developments and a proposed bike connection.

Mr. Gabe Vicknair noted across the interstate from Downtown East is BREC's Memorial Stadium, which includes plans for a major sports complex. BREC is working on a bike pathway from Memorial Stadium to Southern University; additionally, Spanish Town Road will be improved with sidewalks and bike lanes through Memorial Stadium and into downtown.

- a. **Elysian III, North Street** – Construction is close to being completed on the exterior. These are residential apartments under construction, with a total of 42 units.
 - b. **Valencia Park, Spanish Town Road** – Construction is finally underway; the development will consist of 110 residential units of which 80% of the units will be Government assisted.
 - c. **Lotus Village, Council on Aging, Spanish Town & 16th Streets** – Construction has started and is at the framing stages. The 116-unit development is a new senior housing development and is aimed at low to moderate income seniors.
- **Water Campus, Water Street** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the completion of Water Street at the railroad tracks, which is ready to be opened pending final approval from the Railroad.
 - **River Center Theatre** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the River Center Theatre under construction. Lisa Nice, Architect/Post Architects updated the Commission on the status of the work. Updated renderings showed the addition of the front of the theatre where the lobby area has been increased more than double in size. Construction photos show a new elevator tower in the front of the theatre in addition to 3 new elevators in the theatre public spaces for ADA accessibility. In the auditorium, seating was increased, for a total of 1750 seats, balcony seating and side boxes were added with deluxe seating in the first two rows. A reception space was added on the second level and additional restrooms;

overall all aspects of the theatre have been improved. Gabe Vicknair stated the DDD staff has been helping with the location of the Mestrovic sculptures in the plaza area and landscaping for planters around the theatre plaza and City Hall. Lisa Nice added that the plaza and City Hall will have ADA access from St. Louis Street with a drop off lane.

- **Rivermark Centre** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the construction at I Rivermark Centre (south tower) which is a mixed-use development with high-end residential units, office and ground-floor retail. Mr. Gary Black, representing Wampold Companies explained the concept of the Rivermark logo and showed an image of the rooftop amenity to be utilized for meetings and events. Recent construction photos show progress of the pavilion and canopy connecting the lobbies of the two towers. Chase will continue to lease one floor of the high-rise for its business banking department.
- **Beauregard Town Historic District** – Collin Lindrew with the City Planning Commission, updated the Commission on the status of Beauregard Town seeking local historic district status. Grant funding was awarded June 2019 in the amount of \$17,500 to fund design guidelines and for an architectural survey of all structures and architectural styles. The Planning Commission has been working with the civic association, the property owners and Councilwoman Coleman to get input and discuss potential concerns, the support has been positive. A formal application has been submitted for historic status and will be heard at the July 14th Historic Preservation Commission meeting. If approved, it will be heard at the August Planning Commission meeting and the September Metro Council meeting. If approved by all, Beauregard Town will be Baton Rouge’s third local historic district along with Spanish Town and Drehr Place. Beauregard Town is currently on the National Register District; becoming a local historic district essentially adds a layer of protection for property owners within its boundaries. In 2019, the state made changes with less restrictive rules than in the past. A change from the more restrictive rules that govern Spanish Town and Drehr Place, property owners would need only to apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness for new construction, additions visible from the street and exterior features on commercial uses.
- **Cary Saurage Community Arts Center** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center, currently under renovation. 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. Gabe Vicknair stated the DDD staff was able to tour the building recently with employees of the Arts Council and noticed some accessibility issues. Ryan Benton briefed the Commission on the accessibility issues and solutions regarding ADA ramps, sidewalks & curbs, existing tree wells and parking & traffic circulations. The initial priorities are for short term improvements to correct deficiencies such as accessibility improvement, striping and parking

improvements, tree trimming and building visibility. The future phase is to work with Traffic Engineering to develop a flexible pedestrian street on Somerulos Street, traffic flow changes and custom painted crosswalks. In addition, install landscaping in front of the building and further develop design for remaining curb extensions.

Mysti Byrnes, Director of Public Relations with the Arts Council thanked the City and DDD for working with them on these issues and solutions. The Arts Council staff will be moving into the building mid-July and the grand opening is scheduled for September 30th from 7:00PM-10:00PM. Farm Fete, BREADA's annual gala is being held across the street at the River Center Library on the same date, but at a different time, 5:00PM-8:00PM. Dual tickets are available on their websites.

- **Mayor's Homelessness Prevention Coalition (HPC)** – Dr. Pamela Ravare-Jones updated the Commission, via PowerPoint, on the Mayor's Homelessness Prevention Coalition (HPC). The Volunteers of America for the greater Baton Rouge area had a ribbon cutting ceremony on June 7th to launch a mobile outreach van. Adding outreach through the mobile unit at three of the main library branches with high homeless traffic. Staff will help and assist them with applying for eligible benefits, advocate on behalf of consumers, assist them with attaining safe, decent and affordable housing. They will also get appropriate medical and behavioral health care from the mobile unit.

The following are a list of references:

- Capital Area Alliance for the Homeless: Homeless Request - Outreach Portal (<https://laboscoc.org/outreach>) This website allows the individual to be tracked by several different partners in order to provide those resources for them.
- Homelessness Prevention Contribution Website - brhelps.org
- HPC Brochure – Available on the City-Parish Website brla.gov

A new initiative, Mayor's Behavioral Health Homeless Outreach Team (BH-HOT) will launch the summer of 2021. It will be a collaboration between Baton Rouge Police, EBR Sheriff and behavioral health specialists focused on panhandling and homeless encampments. Two teams will go to affected areas to assess individuals to provide assessment, care coordination, and clinical intervention for the homeless.

- **MAP Design Group, LLC** – Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission of a new 3,400 square foot office development for MAP Design Group, LLC, a minorityowned architecture and engineering firm, will be breaking ground soon near the Electric Depot on Government Street. Company owner and president Merrel A. Porché wasn't able to make it this month, but will be attendance for next month's meeting.

- **Outdoor Dining Grant Program** – Ryan Benton briefed the Commission on a \$15,000 Outdoor Dining Grant Program which will launch next month and help businesses make up for lost revenue due to the pandemic.

Program Overview:

- Reimbursement of 50% of the cost of approved dining furniture
 - Reimbursement of Sidewalk Café application fee and first year permit fees
 - Assistance from DDD staff on drafting permit application, including developing required seating layout plans, photos, and other supporting materials
 - Maximum grant award of \$1,500, which includes furniture, application, and permit fees
 - Example: \$2610 for 3 folding tables & 9 folding chairs + \$150 application fee + \$208 permit fee = \$2968: Cost to business: \$1484 (50%)
- **Riverfront Plaza, Phase II and III** – Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on Riverfront Plaza, Phase II which is a streetscape improvements project along River Road. Originally the bids came in higher than expected, plans were updated and resubmitted to be bid May 27. However, there were no bidders, possibly because the project is too small for most construction companies. It was decided to combine Phases II & III to be bid together.

Riverfront Plaza, Phase III is under design with Carbo Landscape Architecture. They are working on a location and space design for a shade structure at Riverfront Landing near the dock. In addition, they are currently working with structural engineers to determine whether it will be feasible and what the foundation requirements will be. Once this is complete, hopefully in the next few months, Phase II & III will be put out for bids.

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

- **Williams Architecture, One American Place** – Marcus Williams, Architect/Williams Architecture, introduced himself to the Commission. Mr. Williams is excited to be part of the downtown area and looking forward to additional work and opportunities with businesses downtown. Williams Architecture is one of the only Black-owned architecture firms in Baton Rouge.
- **Webb’s Barber Shop, Eddie Robinson Drive** –Gabe Vicknair stated owner Lenny Davis wasn’t able to attend the meeting. Webb’s Barber Shop will be moving shortly into a newly constructed building directly across the street from the original location on Eddie Robinson. The Black-owned family barber shop on Eddie Robinson Drive, has been open in Baton Rouge for over 100 years.

9. Events - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images for the following events. Gabe Vicknair stated live events are returning to the downtown area.

- Soul Food Festival – June 26-27
- Pride Festival –Riverfront Plaza, Levee Stage, June 26th, 12PM-4PM
- USS Kidd – Patriots & Pirates, A Revolutionary Celebration for the 4th of July
- Preserve Louisiana/Old Governor’s Mansion – Self-guided museum tours
- Manship Theatre – Juneteenth Speaker Series – Tiffany Cross – June 18th 7PM
- Manship Theatre – Werewolves Within (2021) Horror/Comedy – July 1st 7:30PM
- LSU MOA – Father’s Day Shopping Sale, Form & Fire, The Boneyard – June 15-20
- Capital Park Museum – Juneteenth Celebration – 6PM
- Old State Capitol – Two Presidents, One Photographer exhibit – Opening July 13th
- River Center Events – So You Got Jokes: Starring DC Youngfly – July 3rd
- LASM – Sunday Stargazing (Planetarium) through June 27th
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – Saturday, July 3rd

10. Ongoing Projects: There was no information to report

11. Correspondence: There was no information to report

12. Public Comment – None

13. Meeting Adjourned – Mr. Eric Dexter moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Jude Melville seconded and the meeting was adjourned.