

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

April 11, 2023 8:00 AM

First United Methodist Church, 939 America Street

Board Members in Attendance: Mr. Eric Dexter-Chairman, Mr. Patrick Michaels Secretary, Mr. Scott Hensgens, Ms. Melanie Montanaro, Mr. Gary Jupiter

Absent: Mr. Jude Melville-Vice Chairman, Mr. Prescott Bailey-Treasurer

Others in Attendance: Molly Sanchez, Luke Lognion, Debra Kastner, Judy Foust, Caroline Cassagne, Mary Durusau, Kate Prejean, Branon Pesnell, Dana Brown, Jeff Gober, Jason Langlois, Jill Kidd, Kara Robinett, Troy Townley, Anna Gasperecz, Narcisse Burchell, Charles Daniel, Jarrett Cohen, Michele Carbo, Rannah Gray, Cary Anderson, Jeffery Leuenberger, Chuck Booksh, Gilles Morin, Colin Lindrew, Adrienne Kors, Colleen Rials, Sarah Amacker, Natisha Natt, Pam Bordelon, Carolyn Coleman, Casey Tate, Ute Cress

Casey Tate stated Whitney Hoffman Sayal, DDD Executive Director, was under the weather and he would be conducting the meeting. Mr. Tate welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting and thanked First United Methodist Church for hosting the meeting.

1. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Melanie Montanaro made a motion to approve the agenda, Scott Hensgens seconded and the motion was approved.
3. Scott Hensgens made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 14, 2023 meeting, Patrick Michaels seconded the motion, and the motion was approved.

4. Updates from previous Board meeting:

- **Strategic Plan** – Casey Tate updated the Commission on the status Strategic Plan. Since the last meeting, the survey for the Strategic Plan was released. Mr. Tate stated there have been approximately 1200 responses to the survey. The DDD did a lot of media blasts through emails, social media blasts, and other media sources such as the Business Report, The Advocate, flyers, and A-frames signs on the street. This survey is crucial to our Strategic Plan, is open to anyone to take, and will end on April 14. Attached to the agenda is a link to the survey, if you haven't taken it, please do so.
- **MOVEBR** – Rannah Gray updated the Commission on the status of the Florida Street ADA Compliance project. Ms. Gray reported the work has been completed at intersections 7th Street and Convention and Florida and the block between 6th & 7th on Convention. For the next two weeks, work is being done on the ramps at Convention & 5th and 5th and Florida. Additional

work is being done on 5th Street to remove and replace the driveway at St. James Episcopal School while they are out of school this week. A subcontractor will be working on the signal work, adding pedestrian pushbuttons at 5th & Convention and North Boulevard & 4th. After those intersections have been completed, the next phase will be 4th Street between North Boulevard and Florida. When complete, the project will result in 29 ADA-compliant ramps, 600 square yards of repaired sidewalks, 29 audible pedestrian pushbuttons, 688 square yards of repaired driveways, and 1 mid-block crossing on Convention Street, a flyer is available for additional information. For construction-related problems, call 311, 311.brla.gov, or the 311 Red Stick app.

- **Capitol Lakes** – Casey Tate updated the Commission on the Capitol Lakes clean-up project. The Environmental Protection Agency added the cleanup of the lakes to its national priorities list. Adding the site to the list commits the federal agency to prioritize funding for cleanup and enforcement.

5. **Governmental Issues:** Casey Tate updated the Commission.

- **617 North Boulevard Demolition** – The Historic Preservation Committee approved the demolition plans for 617 North Boulevard. A representative with Key Real Estate will be attending a DDD meeting in the future to give an update.
- **Veteran Parking:** - The Baton Rouge Metropolitan Council approved 5 parking spaces downtown for Veterans. The locations will be, South River Road near the USS Kidd, St. Louis/Louisiana @ the City Hall Courthouse, two spaces on North/4th Street @ Capitol Park, and one on Capital Access Road @ Veteran’s Memorial Park. Veteran Affairs assisted with the location of the spaces based on where veterans frequent downtown.

6. **Development Initiatives:**

- A. **Downtown Greenway** – The Commission viewed slides, via PowerPoint, on the status of construction of the Downtown Greenway Louisiana Avenue for a bike and pedestrian crossing under the interstate. Casey Tate showed the Commission a current construction picture and a rendering of what it will look like when completed. Mr. Tate stated this should be completed soon, with some paving, painting, and lighting improvements. In addition to this project, DDD is working with some consultants to get cost estimates to improve the lighting for security and visual enhancements on the gateways under the interstate.
- B. **263 Third Street** – The Commission viewed slides, via PowerPoint, renderings of 263 Third Street. Casey Tate stated the Cohen Group out of New Orleans own the building and plan on developing it for office and supplemental retail with a restaurant on the first floor and possibly one on the rooftop. Mr. Tate stated Jarret Cohen was scheduled to speak but had not yet arrived, he will be scheduled for a future meeting.

****Mr. Jarret Cohen entered the meeting at the end of the Events announcements.**

- C. **Capital Cities Downtown Leaders Forum** – Casey Tate briefed the Commission on the development of a group Whitney Hoffman Sayal, formed with downtown leaders from capital

cities to collaborate on issues facing downtowns with employees working virtually since the pandemic. A forum was held via Zoom with about 24 downtown city leaders. The meeting was well received and the group decided to meet quarterly.

D. Inaugural Louisiana DDD Meeting – Casey Tate informed the Commission of another inaugural meeting of the Louisiana Downtown Development Districts (DDD), which Whitney Hoffman Sayal spearheaded. The DDDs of New Orleans, Lake Charles, Lafayette, and Baton Rouge all met for the first time at the New Orleans DDD office on March 27. The gathering of the DDDs was very successful, meeting for about 5 hours, discussing all aspects of the offices including how they are structured and funded, and exchanging ideas and knowledge on how to make the downtowns better. Plans are to have annual meetings, with the Baton Rouge hosting the next one.

E. Planning Commission Spanish Town Grant – Gilles Morin, Assistant Planning Director, updated the Commission. Mr. Morin stated the month of May is National Historic Preservation Month, and the Metropolitan Council will issue a proclamation on April 26. To kick off Preservation Month, in conjunction with Capitol Park Museum, an event will be held on May 6, at the Capitol Park Museum at 9:00 AM. There will be discount admissions to the museum and free walking and biking tours of Spanish Town, the walking tours are at 10:00 AM & 1:00 PM, and the biking tour begins at 11:30 AM.

Last September the Planning Commission addressed the DDD Commission and spoke about a preservation grant for Spanish Town from the Louisiana State Historic Preservation. The grant will update the Spanish Town standing structure survey and the 1978 Spanish Town National Historic Register District. The first draft was submitted on March 31, with 298 resources within Spanish Town, which includes buildings, structures, and objects. Each item has to be photographed and logged into the survey, to be approved by the State before it is incorporated into the actual report, which is ongoing. The second draft is due mid-June and the final is in August. Once that is completed, the GIS department will create a type of electronic “storyboard” which can be accessed by the public and they can do a self-guided tour.

F. New Businesses -

- **Dark 30** - Kara Robinett, owner, stated Dark 30 is a wine and craft cocktail bar at 151 Third St. that was formerly part of Lucy's Retired Surfers Bar. They will offer a curated collection of black, LBTGQ, women & locally owned products along with natural, organic, biodynamic, and sustainable wines & spirits. They will also have FULL zero-proof menu including wine, spirits & beer. They have partnered with vineyards and distilleries that give back to the community, are dedicated to supporting local artists, and will be looking for more ways to give back as they grow. Mr. Robinett stated her business partner is an ex-marine and the name Dark 30 is a military slang for 12:30 AM aka “dark 30”. They plan on being open by the first of May.
- **Town Square Pizza** – Dana Brown, owner, stated this is not his first business downtown. He is an attorney and with his father Ossie Brown, opened a law office. In 2014, he ventured with others to open Jolie Pearl Oyster Bar. He and Derek Fitch will be opening Town Square

Pizza, will serve square pizzas and salads. Everything in the restaurant will be square. Pizzas will be served in 10 minutes or less and they plan on being open during lunch, with an opening mid to late May.

- **HNTB** – Katie Prejean with HNTB briefed the Commission on HNTB moving back downtown. Many years ago they had started in Catfish Town and they will be moving into the River Mark Centre on May 15. They have space for about 55 employees and they currently have 45 on staff. Everyone is excited about moving downtown and visiting all the establishments.
- **Louisiana Lighthouse** – Molly Sanchez briefed the Commission. Lighthouse Louisiana has been in New Orleans and Baton Rouge since 1915, they have been downtown in One American Place for about a year and a half. Lighthouse Louisiana works with people who have visual impairments and the deaf. They work with those individuals with occupational and physical therapy and teach them how to live independently. There is a store in One American Place, available to anyone needing reading glasses or magnifiers and all other types of resources. They have a contract in place with the federal government for blind workers to produce paper products, mess trays for the Army, mops, pillowcases, etc. On May 4th they are having coffee and donuts to kick off 225 Gives. They appreciate the ADA improvements being made to the intersections downtown by MOVEBR, as they are very important to those individuals with disabilities trying to cross the streets.

7. Events -

Casey Tate updated the Commission on the following events:

- Spring Festivals –
 - Ebb & Flow – April 1-30, Celebrating BR’s unique intersection of arts, culture & ecology
 - Baton Rouge Blues Fest – April 21-23, Multiple stages downtown
 - Sunday in the Park – April 23, Kristen Diable-Blues 2:00 PM -5:00 PM
 - Live After Five – April 21, Chris Leblanc Band, 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM
 - Soul Food Festival, May 20-21, Riverfront Plaza & Levee Stage
- Baton Rouge Entrepreneurship Week – May 1-6
- Crawfish King Cook-Off, May 5, Rhorer Plaza
- Manship Theatre – Morgan James, May 23, 7:30 PM
- LSU MOA – Exhibition, “I, Too, am Thornton Dial”, March 30 – July 2
- Capital Park Museum – Tuesday – Saturdays 9:00 – 4:00 PM
- Old State Capitol – Prohibition Era Exhibit & Events through August 19
- River Center – April Events
 - MercyMe, Christian Worship, April 14
 - Harlem Globetrotters, April 16
 - The Price is Right Live, April 20
 - Ashley McBryde, April 21
 - Shinedown, April 22
 - Disney on Ice, April 27-30

- LASM – Y2K Neon Night, April 21 & Astronomy Day, April 22
- USS. Kidd – Open Daily 9:30 AM-3:30 PM
- Red Stick Farmer’s Market –Every Saturday 8:00-12:00 on the Corner of 5th and Main Streets
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – Every First Saturday of the Month, May 6th

******Mr. Jarrett Cohen, co-owner, of 263 Third Street (Old State National Life building), entered the meeting at this time and updated the Commission on this project. Mr. Cohen showed the Commission slides, via PowerPoint of the proposed renovations. He stated that in 2021 they acquired the building at 263 Third Street at the corner of Florida and Third Streets and plan on renovating the building for office use once again. The building is 7 stories and approximately 45,000 square feet. Plans for the first floor include Downtown Grocery, and expanding the lobby and a restaurant or retail concept. They are in talks with a group from Georgia looking at leasing both the second and third floors for co-working. There is a huge demand for co-working areas in downtown, all the co-working sites have wait lists. On the third floor, there is a terrace area in which plans are to open up a lower roof to create more of an indoor/outdoor space. On floors 4-7 plans are typical office areas. A penthouse event space is planned on the rooftop, with a 360-degree view of the entire downtown area.

8. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- **Chris Nichols Celebration of Life** – There was a Celebration of Life Event about a month ago held in Town Square for Ms. Chris Nichols. Ms. Nichols requested certain videos and music be played on the Beacon and a second line from Town Square to her office on North Boulevard. Ms. Nichols was active in the revitalization of downtown through her work and dedication to the Downtown Development District.
- **Prescriptions to Geaux 10-Year Anniversary** - Prescriptions to Geaux welcomed current, former, and future customers to celebrate 10 years of serving the downtown community. The Open house with refreshments and prizes was held from 12-3 PM on March 17th.
- **Civil Rights Trail Marker Dedication** – The Louisiana of Tourism unveiled a Civil Rights Trail Marker on March 30, 203 at the S.H. Kress Department store. The store located on Third Street joins nine other sites on the trail. Those 10 markers have been added over the last three years. There are two others downtown, one at the Old State Capital and the A.Z. Young Park. The S.H. Kress Department Store was where students from Southern University held a sit-in on March 28, 1960. The students sat at the lunch counter in the store and were arrested by police.

9. Public Comment:

- Luke Lognion with BRASS mentioned the Blues Fest which is being held April 21 -23. The Chris LeBlanc Band will be playing Friday night, April 23 at Live After Five. Blues Fest VIP tickets are available at the Blues Fest website for access to the 4th floor of the River Center Branch Library. Don’t forget to shop locally at the Blues Fest, all the vendors from the Arts Market will be there.
- Pam Bordelon with the Arts Council, debuting at Blues Fest and Live After Five in conjunction with Ebb & Flow a video is going to be projected on the side of the Old State Capitol at sunset.
- Latisha Next with Baton Rouge Entrepreneurship Week (BREW) announced BREW is a multi-day, multi-venue experience for entrepreneurs, inventors, investors, techies, creatives, foodies, and anyone with an interest in shaping our community. This year’s event features a special

keynote from Gayle Benson, owner of the New Orleans Saints & Pelicans. Festivities kick off on Monday, May 1 with a family-friendly block party in Town Square and culminates with a live pitch competition with an investment prize totaling \$100,000.

- Mary Durusau, Director of the Old State Capitol announced a soft re-opening of the Old Governor's Mansion on May 3 from 5:00 PM and 7:00 PM. Ms. Durusau asked if anyone was aware of when the new parking meters would begin. Casey Tate stated the DDD has been involved in meeting with the Administration. The old meters have been removed and the new kiosks are in place. The signage to pay is installed, but are not working at the moment. Mr. Tate asked if everyone could abide by the two-hour parking time limits, the loading zone time limits, and the red no-parking zones.
- Nedra Hains, Deputy Director of the LSU MOA announced a panel is rescheduled for Thornton Dial on May 11 @ 6:00 PM. Also, working along with Ebb & Flow, gospels will be held in the galleries and most of the events are free and open to the public. Ms. Hains gave an update on the Executive Director search, this next week 4 finalists will be having day-long interviews and will hopefully have a new director by summer.
- Michelle Carbo with Junior Achievement stated they are still mentoring kids on entrepreneurship, work readiness skills, and financial literacy. They are partnered with Big Buddy in the Crawfish King Cook-Off event, which has been going on for 9 years. They are expecting 35 teams and will boil about 13- 15 thousand pounds of crawfish. Tickets are being sold to the public and are in partnership with Downtown Business Association and Live After Five. The event will take place in Rhorer Plaza behind City Hall and will be facing North Boulevard.
- Darlene Rowland with BREADA stated that April is National Garden Month, there is more than food at the market, along with plants, herbs, and tomato plants you won't find at your local nursery. Also, on Tuesdays, the Farmer's Market reopens beginning today at the Goodwood Library from 3 PM – 6 PM.
- Jeff Gober, chairman of the Historic Spanish Town, stated in the Louisiana Legislature, House Bill 11, states if you have parades/events you are responsible for 100% of the cleanup. He stated that it comes across as an anti-litter bill, however, it's an anti-parade bill. In addition, next year, any event in the state of Louisiana that is not sponsored by a city or government entity will follow the same guidelines to clean up 100%. His concern is that small events may struggle with costs potentially impacting events downtown.
- Branon Pesnell with Corporate Realty stated they are a new business downtown and are a new full-service realty firm, property management, and all-commercial real estate company which was purchased in 2021 by the Benson family. They are located in One American Place, with 3 employees, and are looking forward to doing business downtown.

10. Meeting Adjourned – Melanie Montanaro moved to adjourn the meeting, Gary Jupiter seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned.