

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

August 13, 2024

Raising Cane's River Center, Riverview Room

Board Members in Attendance: Mr. Eric Dexter-Chairman, Mr. Prescott Bailey-Vice Chairman, Mr. Patrick Michaels-Treasurer, Mr. Gary Jupiter-Secretary, Mr. Joshua Hollins, Mr. Philip Jordan

Absent: Ms. Tara Titone

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Gabriella Duvall, Nick Lanata, Caroline Cassagne, Collin Lindrew, Kendra Hendricks, Elise Tausin, Emily Dunaway, Kelly Lee, Barbara Fields, Allie Schleiter, Jeff Corbin, Mark Goodson, T.C. Lam, Garrick Rose, Jasmine Thomas, Lauryn Hinton, Rachel Shields, Charles Daniel, Lisa Nice, Quincy Richard, Frederick Sargent, Jason Crain, Steven Gibson, Barbara Guglielmo, Bridget Gaffney, Rhett Butler, Angelica Collins, Mary Jane Marcantal, Luke Lognion, Rannha Gray, Kim Mascagni, Dwayne Sanburn, Jessica Lewis, Samantha Morgan, Karen Soniat, Colleen Rials, Amanda Lannata, Jordan Arceneaux, Anne Mahoney, Sarah Noles.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the Riverview Room at the River Center for the DDD Commission meeting.

1. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Joshua Hollins made a motion to approve the agenda, Prescott Bailey seconded, and the motion was approved.
3. Joshua Hollins motioned to approve the minutes from the April 17 and June 11 meetings, Prescott Bailey seconded, and the motion was approved.

4. Governmental Issues:

- **2025 DDD Budget** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the 2025 Budget with a projected budget of total projected revenue of \$865,620. \$723,390 is anticipated for property taxes to be generated, in addition to \$138,230 from the City-Parish general fund. Also included were budgets for a decrease to 90% (\$124,407) and 80% (\$110,584) supplement from the city. Overall, not much has changed from the 2024 budget. The project budget cuts from the city would primarily impact the Other Contractual and Other Professional Services line items, which are primarily used for additional marketing, materials, programs, and small projects. Eric Dexter asked how the Commission would know which budget would be approved by the Council. Mrs. Hoffman Sayal stated all departments were asked to submit the 10% & 20% budget cuts. The Finance Department will include these in the overall budget package and the Council and Mayor work together to make those final decisions. Mr. Hollins asked if there was any way for revenue to be generated to make up the 10-20 percent budget cuts from the City-Parish. As far as Mrs. Hoffman Sayal is aware, the DDD has never generated revenue but a discussion could be had. Philip Jordan motioned to approve the 2025 Budget as submitted, Patrick Michaels seconded, there were no objections and the motion was approved.

Gary Jupiter entered the Commission meeting at this time.

- **Updated Bylaws** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the updates within the bylaws and thanked Eric Dexter and Joshua Hollins for their work on the proposed update. The bylaw update was a recommendation of the Strategic Plan. The original bylaws were written in the 1980s, there were some changes made to the state legislation in 2012 that conflicted with the bylaws which the DDD was operating under, which caused some confusion when hiring a DDD Executive Director. The proposed bylaws update the boundary description and commissioner representation to align with the 2012 legislation. They also streamline the nominating committee process for DDD officers, include guidance on how the Executive Director is selected, and incorporate general structural changes for more clarity and consistency. Joshua Hollins motioned to approve the updated bylaws, Gary Jupiter seconded, with no opposition, and the motion was approved.
- **Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) -2-24, 103 France Street** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. In June, the HPC had a request from the Belle Casino to demolish the Maritime II building at 103 France Street in the Downtown Development District, which was denied. The Belle Casino appealed to the Metro Council but then was deleted from the agenda by the Casino. The Casino is interested in pursuing tax credits and the DDD is working with them on the tax opportunities.
- **River Center Steering Committee** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission and stated that the committee is a recommendation from Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome's strategic plan to redevelop the River Center. The Mayor-President proposed an 11-member Project Oversight Committee, selected and approved by the Metro Council to study and make recommendations to the Council.

The members being represented on the Steering Committee are:

- Carolyn Coleman, Metro Council District 10 and Committee Chair
- Jill Kidder, Visit Baton Rouge, and Vice Chair
- Jonathan Grimes, Arts Council
- Anne Trappey, Baton Rouge Area Chamber
- Chris Meyer, Baton Rouge Area Foundation
- Rodney Braxton, Build Baton Rouge
- Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Downtown Development District
- Gray Jupiter, Hospitality Representative
- April Hawthorne, North Baton Rouge Economic Development District
- Jennifer Racca, Metro Council appointment

The first meeting is scheduled today at the River Center at 10:00 AM and the public will be updated on the River Center Strategic Committee moving forward.

5. Update from the Previous Board Meeting

- **Florida Corridor Update** - Kendra Hendricks, Director of Operations and Programs of Build Baton Rouge updated the Commission and showed slides, via PowerPoint, on the status of the master plan. The Florida Corridor Plan outlines how current and future neighborhood assets, residents, businesses, and visitors can thrive. Ms. Hendricks stated the project schedule is at the finish line, the process started in

June of 2023. Over 4,000 residents and stakeholders engaged in the process with numerous comments and feedback and there were 5 advisory meetings to discuss the entire corridor. There are six neighborhood centers, including 'The Stitch' which is in the DDD;

1. The Stitch: N. 5th – N. 19th
2. Mid City: N. 22nd -Park Hills Drive
3. Foster & Florida: Wards Creek – Marquette Avenue
4. Bon Carre: Marquette Avenue – Airline Highway
5. Cortana: Airline Highway – Monterrey Boulevard
6. Sherwood: Sherwood Forest Boulevard – N. Flannery Road

Three corridor-wide strategies were formed:

1. Land Use & Development
2. Placemaking
3. Transportation
- 4.

The Florida Corridor Plan identified 47 opportunity sites across the 6 Neighborhood Centers. Each site was evaluated and categorized as a near-term catalyst project, a mid-term opportunity site and a long-term aspirational site. The plan is scheduled to be adopted by the Planning Commission and Metropolitan Council. The full plan can be found at www.floridacorridorbr.com

- **Ai Update – Event Data** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on downtown event data obtained with Placer.ai, a program DDD has been using to determine how many people visit downtown during certain times. The AI data tool can also determine the psychographic demographics within a boundary. This information can be used to determine how to market to those groups. Downtown is primarily broken down into two user groups, Singles & Starters (young singles starting out and some starter families living a city lifestyle with higher income) and Aspirational Fusion (lower-income singles and single parents living in urban locations, striving to make a better life).

The Duck Hunters expo was held at the River Center on July 26 – 28 which had a total of 22 thousand visitors and 11.5 thousand visitors on Saturday, July 27.

6. Development Initiatives:

- **2024 Development Toolkit** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal showed the Commission slides, via PowerPoint, the annual Development Toolkit that supplies data and information for developers and businesses interested in locating downtown. Included in this year's toolkit is information from Placer AI and the International Downtown Association's findings. The report includes:
 - **Investment** – 2.7 Billion total in investment since the DDD creation in 1987
 - **Property values** are 2.5 higher than the Parish wide average
 - **Major Development Projects**
 - **Business** – 20% citywide jobs, 19% growth in private jobs, 15% growth in primary jobs
 - Total Taxable Income – 31,172 daily workers, 51.3% female, 49.7% male
 - **Office Rental & Occupancy Rates** – 88% occupancy, Class A- 86.92%, Class B/C 94%, public & private square footage rate
 - **Residential** – \$224.6 million invested, 90% residential occupancy, 16.4% growth since 2012

- **Hospitality** – \$135 million hotel investment since 2010, \$151.59 average daily rate, 68.4% occupancy rate, March most popular month
- **Tourism** – 171 boat dockings + 17,096 visitors, 731 thousand monthly visitors average October 2023-March 2024, 25 thousand daily visitors average October 2023 – March 2024
- Attendance of all attractions
- **Greenspace** - 17 parks and natural areas, 53 acres of open space, \$400 million total greenspace investment
- **Arts** – 44 public art installations, 11 art venues (theaters & large venues)
- **Culture** – 20 cultural attractions, 65 food spots
- **Events** – 1000 +, 130,000 visitors Spanish Town, 10,000 + attendance Night Market, 52 Farmers Markets
- **River Center** – Zydeco Hockey, \$8.1 million economic impact
- **Safety** – 24-hour police, 23 officers, less than 2% of the city’s violent crimes
- **Parking** – Total of 8,089 spaces, 3828 off-street, 3706 private, 555 on-street, 11 garages
- **Marketing** – 90,568 total impressions, 8,300 FB followers, 3,672 Instagram, 309 LinkedIn, 138 newsroom articles
- **DDD Newsletter** – 3516 subscribers sent out weekly
- **Resources** – includes QR Code
- **Planning** – plan review process for Planning Commission and Permit Office
- **Downtown Character areas and Neighborhood maps**
- **What does the DDD do?** – DDD created a new section on the DDD website that describes what the DDD does

The Toolkit will be released later today on our website at www.downtownbatonrouge.org

- **Riverfront Study Survey Results** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the DDD Riverfront Survey. The DDD in co-sponsorship with the Mayor’s office, hosted an open house event highlighting the work of the LSU Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture fourth-year students. The students highlighted their ideas on how to provide visitors and citizens with more quality of life experiences and increase tourism to the region. In coordination with the LSU Architecture open house, DDD sent out a survey on the Downtown Riverfront to provide greater opportunity for public input on how we can enhance our downtown riverfront. The survey had 414 responses. The majority of responders said they would like to see retail businesses and restaurants. Around 60% said they wanted enhanced safety measures near the riverfront, enhanced lighting, and more green spaces. 72% said the riverfront is an important investment as a public asset. A large majority said connectivity to the riverfront and amenities are important when planning changes to the River Center.
- **American Planning Association (APA) Advocacy** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the APA Annual Advocacy Day. A Zoom was held to speak with Senators and members of Congress and their staff to support the continuation of pro-housing grants, which eliminates barriers to housing, as well as planning funds to help planners understand what housing is needed and where it should be located. Additionally, APA advocated for the Revitalizing Downtown Act to convert empty commercial buildings into housing units.

- **US Census Bureau Panel** – Casey Tated briefed the Commission. The DDD was invited by the International Downtown Association to participate in a listening session with the US Census Bureau along with Bangor Maine, Austin and Houston, Texas. The Bureau has a new program, the Curated Data Enterprise (CDE) which studies a new approach for creating official statistics to collect data differently - beyond census tracts and/or zip codes. They asked what downtowns need to help them better serve their constituents.
 - A. Discussion #1 – Statistical Products
 1. What keeps you awake at night because you lack data and statistics
 2. What statistical products would help you
 3. What would add value to your statistical products
 4. What data sources do you recommend
 5. How do we collaborate and engage to better understand your needs
 - B. Discussion #2 – Data Equity
 1. How do you define a resilient downtown
 2. Are there measures to assess progress toward achieving resilient housing for low-income populations
 3. How do we prioritize what statistical products to develop first
 4. What tools do you need to access and use statistical products
 5. How can we ensure equitable solicitation and development of statistical products

Mr. Tate stated they will continue these ongoing conversations with the Bureau. The DDD uses the data in the Development Toolkit for recruitment tools for businesses, events, etc.
- **Office of Homeless Prevention** - Jessica Lewis, Director of Homeless Prevention presented a PowerPoint presentation to the Commissioners to mitigate homelessness in Baton Rouge. In Baton Rouge, there are approximately 435 homeless, down from 536 in 2022. Since March 2024 a Homeless Tracking Tool to assist with solutions in real-time has been established. They have contacted St. Vincent De Paul shelter to extend their hours of operation, in addition, there are plans to build a new 24-hour non-congregate shelter. Collaborations have begun with the Louisiana Housing Corporation and Start Corporation to house 200 homeless individuals. They have worked with the Department of Transportation to install fencing under the O’Neal Lane underpass and with DPW for monthly clean-up rotations at homeless encampments. In February, Mayor Sharon Weston Broome announced \$10 million in investments to go toward combating homelessness. Investments include \$2 million spent on shelters and prioritizing police presence in key areas. House Bill 97, Act 678 was passed by the Legislature in 2024 which states it is illegal for any solicitation to take place on an interstate highway or in a public right-of-way or any entrance or exit ramp of an interstate highway. Ms. Lewis stated the best way to help the homeless is to donate to a local non-profit that assists with items and services needed. Ms. Lewis presented a document on who to contact for homelessness, loitering, and substance abuse and will leave the documents in the back of the room for your information.
- **St. Joseph Cathedral Improvements** – The Commission viewed slides, via PowerPoint, of improvements planned on the grounds of the Cathedral. Barbara Guglielmo, Chair of the Garden Committee addressed the Commission about the campus improvements in the Bishop’s Garden, where 3 Bishops are buried. Ms. Guglielmo enlisted the help of Jeff Carbo, a Landscape Architect from Baton Rouge to design the renovations to the garden. Plans have been completed, however, the project implementation

will be phased in conjunction with available funding. Recent campus improvements to the entrance of the cathedral were recently completed along North and Fourth Streets and were sponsored by the Garden Club and the Preservation Society.

- **ADA Transition Update** – Jason Crain, MOVEBR Deputy Program Manager, updated the Commission on downtown projects. The largest group of projects are the ADA transition projects for ADA issues such as steep slopes, no handicap ramps with proper protection, and adjustment of push buttons to the correct height. There are six projects located downtown.
 - Florida Street area has been completed
 - Main Street is being bid in September
 - East Boulevard is under construction
 - North Boulevard area is to begin construction in September.
 - Laurel/Lafayette Street area is under final design.
 - South Boulevard area project is expected to begin late to mid-September.

The contractor for East Boulevard is ProCivil, anticipated completion is mid-January 2025. Most of the work is along East Boulevard, & T.J. Jemison Boulevard. The planned construction will begin at South Boulevard and work toward America Street, work will be performed block by block. Work within a block is expected to take 2 – 4 weeks, pending weather and the contractor will give a week's notice before beginning into the next block.

The Plank Nicholson Bus Rapid Transit Corridor is the next project to begin and downtown will have 8 new stations. The locations are 3 along St. Ferdinand, 1 at Fourth @ North Boulevard, and 4 on Florida Street. The contractor is Hard Rock Construction and is expected to begin in late September. This is a long project; expected to take approximately 2 years.

The South Boulevard Trailhead Connection project connects the existing South Boulevard sidewalk and South River Road over the railroad tracks to the levee trailhead and provides wayfinding signage. This project will provide better connectivity from the existing paths to the levee trail, connecting downtown to LSU. The construction is expected to begin in the second quarter of 2025.

Downtown residents and businesses can call the Rapid Response number @ 225-399-3123 for construction-related problems that require urgent attention. For additional information please visit www.movebr.brla.gov.

- **Helix Corporate Work Study Program**-Preston Castille, President/CEO of Helix Community schools briefed the Commission. Last summer, Helix Mentorship acquired Franciscan High School's (Cristo Rey) facilities, students, and faculty. Helix Mentorship added Franciscan's Corporate Work Study Program to its curriculum as part of the acquisition. As part of the Work Study program, students in grades 10 through 12 go to work one day a week at a local company or business. If you are an employer of any type, consider sponsoring one of the students to teach and mentor them, allowing them to learn skills to make more of an impact on our community and the workforce. Mr. Castille introduced Mr. Rhett Butler as the new Director of Development for its Corporate Work Study Program and Angelica Collins who is the Corporate Work Study Program Director at Helix and brings experience from previous roles at Franciscan High School. In his new role, Mr. Butler will be responsible for expanding the program and increasing business and community partnerships.

- **PARK(ing) Day** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal introduced Iboro Udoh, DDD Development Project Director since January and is being appointed as the DDD representative to the Complete Streets Advisory Committee.

Mr. Udoh stated DDD is partnering with CPEX and Reich Landscape Architects to organize and participate in this year's parking day. Park(ing) day is to creatively rethink how to look at the urban landscape, specifically parking spaces. People across the world temporarily repurpose curbside parking spaces and convert them into public parks and social spaces to advocate for safer, greener, and more equitable streets for people. This is a temporary installation, but the hope is that it inspires a permanent installation to further the DDD's mission to make downtown more people-centered and a more livable area. Park(ing) day is being held on Friday, September 20th beginning at 9:00 am. This year Park(ing) day will be along 3rd Street from North Boulevard to North Street. If anyone is interested in participating please see me after the meeting or at least come and experience Park(ing) day.

- **New Businesses:**

- **Hot Stuff Restaurant** - Hot Stuff Restaurant serves freshly cooked breakfast and lunch located at 244 Lafayette Street – Open Monday-Friday 6:00 am – 2:00 pm

8. Events -

Casey Tate updated the Commission:

- Digital Knomad, 227 Florida Street, new exhibit
- Ryan's Run/Walk – Galvez Plaza, Saturday, August 24th 8:00 am
- Farm Fete – Thursday, September 26 from 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm @ Main Street Market
- Live After Five Fall Concert Season, Rhorer Plaza - Line-Up announcement - Friday, September 13
- St. Jude Walk/Run, AZ Young Park – Saturday, October 5, 8:30 am.
- Manship Theatre – Movies, Music & more
 - Sierra Green
 - Improv Comedy
 - Chuck Leavell
 - Amanda Shaw
 - Yesterday and Today
 - Black Opry
 - Evangeline
 - R & B Reue
- LSU MOA – Current Exhibits
 - Art in Louisiana: Views into the Collection
 - RenCherished: The Art of Clementine Hunter
 - Fierce Planets: Work from the Studio Art Quilt Associates
- LSU MOA – Events – Southern Reflections: Art by Kathryn Keller & Shirley Rabe Masiner, September 12 – November 27
- Capitol Park Museum – Lunchtime Lagniappe with Andre St. Romaine, Wednesday, August 21 from 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
- Old State Capitol – Exhibits and Events
 - Bridging the Mississippi: Spans Across the Father of the Waters June 8 -October 5
 - Guest Speaker: Chief Justice Bernette Johnson – Thursday, September 19, 10:00-11:30
 - Halloween Fall Craft Workshop, Sunday, October 6th, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm
- Raising Canes River Center – Sesame Street Live, Brantley Gilbert, Hollydays Market & More

- LASM – Shows and Events
 - Read and Create – Saturday, August 17
 - Laser Taylor Swift Singalong, Friday, August 30
 - T. REX Show Premiere, Saturday, August 31
- LASM - Changing Exhibitions
 - Second Nature: Artwork by Chase Mullen
 - Improvisation: The Art & Healing Power of Jazz
 - Ther of Looking Up: Following the Stars, from Ancient Cultures to the Webb
 - Pinpointing the Stars
 - Artistry and Accuracy: Botanical Illustrations by Margaret Stones
- USS Kidd – Veterans Museum Open Daily from 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM
 - Strong and Calm Warrior Yoga, Saturday, September 7 & October 5 from 8:00 – 9:30 AM
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – First Saturday of the month, from 8:00 AM – 12:00
- Red Stick Farmer’s Market – Every Saturday 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM

9. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- Whitney Hoffman Sayal introduced Ms. Rachel Shields, Chief Engagement Officer for Louisiana Economic Development. Ms. Shields is responsible for leveraging and enhancing LED’s relationships with the corporate and private sectors to ensure Louisiana businesses are better served by the state. Ms. Shields stated Louisiana is one of the only southern states that has not increased its population since 2020, in fact, we’ve been losing population over the past couple of years. The mission of LED is to cultivate jobs and economic opportunity for the people of Louisiana. To accomplish this mission, all economic development starts locally, no one knows their municipalities and regions better than they do and a whole of government approach is necessary. State Bill 494: Positioning Louisiana to Win as passed in June of this year. The bill does three specific things for success in economic development:

1. Creates the Louisiana Economic Development Partnership (LEDP) private sector-led advisory board designed to live beyond election cycles
2. The private sector board will create a long-term strategic plan
3. Exempt from the state Office of Procurement to move at the speed of business and exempt from the state Office of Technology Services for improved technology

The bill has allowed the LED to look and work more like the private sector, integrating LED FastStart to help businesses grow and thrive putting Louisiana in a position to win by building a new foundation. The strategic plan is expected to be in place by the end of January 2025.

- **Plan Baton Rouge III** – Eric Dexter announced the beginning stages of Plan Baton Rouge III, Plan Baton Rouge I was created in 1998, and Plan Baton Rouge II in 2008. It’s been almost 15 years since the last Plan of Baton Rouge was created, which is a blueprint for what the future of what downtown should look like and how to make that come to life. The areas of focus for the plan are:
 - Housing
 - Attracting retail and other uses
 - The Riverfront
 - Enhancing connections to assets and corridors
 - Beautification
 - Maintenance/Cleanliness/Safety
 - Transportation/Parking

- Funding models for implementation

The first step is accepting proposals from consultants. Those requests are due October 25, and work will begin in early 2025.

10. Public Comment:

- Frederick Sargent, Electronic Media - Walking Billboards, is licensed with the city and can be used on any city street and in the downtown area, promoting business and events, these are great marketing tools.
- Mary Jane Marcental stated that citizens came together to stop a major corporation from tearing down the Maritime II building at 103 France Street to put up a parking lot. The power of citizens being able to do something for downtown is important. She thanked Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman for helping to keep the Maritime building from being torn down.

11. Meeting Adjourned – Eric Dexter moved to adjourn the meeting, Gary Jupiter seconded and the meeting was adjourned.

DRAFT