

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

December 10, 2024

Hilton Capitol Center

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

Absent: Mr. Joshua Hollins, Ms. Suzanne Turner

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Mary Jane Marcantel, Jasmine Thomas, Nick Lanata, Jonathan Grimes, Frederick Sargent, Jason Crain, Andy Adler, Travis Woodard, Gus Levy, Andrea McCarthy, Brad Bates, Amos Davis, Gary Black, Tim Boone, Derrell Cohoon, Sarah Noles, Darlene Rowland, Matthew Destouet, Sherreta Harrison, Dusty Manson, Wendy Daniels, Ranah Gray, Caroline Marse, Amanda Lanata, Faith Miller, Adrienne K. Horn, Cody Scallions, Mahaliee Kyzar, Allie Schleiter, Collin Lindrew, Laticia King, T.C. Lam, Bridget Gaggney, Councilwoman Carolyn R. Coleman, Lluvia Peveto, Charles Daniel.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone

1. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Eric Dexter moved to approve the agenda, Patrick Michaels seconded and the motion was approved.
3. Gary Jupiter motioned to approve the minutes from the October 8, 2024 meeting, seconded, and the motion was approved.

4. Governmental Issues:

- **2025 DDD Commission Meeting Dates** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the 2025 DDD Commission meeting dates. The DDD meetings are now being held bi-monthly and are still held on the 2nd Tuesday at 8:00 a.m. Listed below are the dates for 2025:

1. February 11, 2025
2. April 8, 2025
3. June 10, 2025
4. August 12, 2025
5. October 14, 2025
6. December 9, 2025

The meeting dates will be posted on the DDD's website.

- **DDD Commissioner, Suzanne Turner** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced the Mayor and the Metro Council recently approved the DDD's new board member, Ms. Suzanne Turner, a resident of Beauregard Town replacing Ms. Tara Titone. Ms. Turner's first meeting will be in February.

- **City Parish/DDD Budget** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the City-Parish/DDD budget status. Mayor-President Broome requested all departments submit a 10% and 20% budget cut for 2025. A 9% budget cut is being proposed for DDD, the city-parish allocation went from \$138,230 to \$125,790; the majority of the DDD funding comes from property tax collection. The cuts were made in printing and binding, travel and training, other professional services, meeting refreshments, and contract employees (interns from LSU). The budget is on the agenda of the special council meeting being held this afternoon, if anyone is interested in attending.
- **DDD/Visit Baton Rouge Gateway Enhancement** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on a monetary contribution from Visit Baton Rouge. Visit Baton Rouge has contributed \$100,000 to the Gateway Enhancement project lighting the area between Louisiana Avenue and North Boulevard which was approved by the council. The lighting enhancements will be installed under the I-110 underpass from Louisiana Avenue (which connects the Government Street bike lanes to the Downtown Greenway) to North Boulevard lighting. DDD has a contract with WHLC Architects for design and construction documents and to help with approvals from DOTD and the city-parish.
- **Downtown Wayfinding ARPA Funds** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced that Mayor-President Broome and the Metro Council approved about \$50,000 through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to contribute towards updating the wayfinding signage. Some signs are in more disrepair than others, however, this is something that needs to be maintained, and the signs are fairly old. This plan was done by Sasaki Landscape Architects in 2008 which also needs to be updated in content. This project should begin in the first quarter of 2025.
- **River Center Oversight Committee Update** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the status of the River Center Oversight Committee. There have been several meetings since our last DDD meeting. This Wednesday, an item is on the agenda for a contract with Total BS, Inc. to provide services in the selection process in criteria development for the RFP for the River Center. There is also a scheduled meeting on Wednesday morning for the River Center Oversight Committee Updates.
- **Historic Tax Credits** – Whitney Hoffman briefed the Commission about the success of the Historic Tax Credits downtown, which were in jeopardy with the tax reform package. The state historic tax credits along with the federal historic tax credits, have been pivotal in the success of the restoration of downtown. A few examples include 440 on Third, the Commerce Building, Rivermark Centre, and the Hilton, without those tax credits, downtown would look very different. Whitney pointed out that One American Place turns 50 years old this year and will be eligible for the tax credits. A few other buildings that need access to these credits include, but are not limited to, State National Life, Maritime II, and Hotel Lincoln.

Whitney introduced Andrea McCarthy, Tax Credit Program Director with the Division of Historic Preservation, and she updated the Commission on the status of the Historic Tax Credits. In the recent Legislative Session, updates to the State Historic Tax Credit program legislation were passed. Ms. McCarthy discussed the differences in the new tax program beginning January 1, 2025. Previously state credits were capped at \$125 million, the new cap is \$85 million; unused funds were rolled over to the next year, and now additional funds will not be rolled over which will make the credits more competitive. Currently, the program is on a first-come, first-served basis and will continue for the next several years as they monitor how this impacts the program. Proposed changes are being made on January 1 on how and when the credits are reserved, and on large projects spread out the credits over a few years, rather than take out large amounts each year. At the beginning of the year, revisions will be

made to the promulgated rules process to be consistent with the new law, and should be in place by June. Ms. McCarthy stated if anyone has a large project coming up, contact her, it may be possible to have the tax credits approved by December 31 before the changes take place on January 1, 2025.

- **RDMA Act** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the Revitalizing Downtowns and Main Streets Act (RDMA). The International Downtown Association is advocating for this bill which is very similar to how the Historic Tax Credits work by providing 20% tax credits for office conversions into residential. It can be used in conjunction with Historic Tax Credits and also includes an affordable housing component that requires at least 20% of residential units created by the credit to be reserved for individuals whose income is at or below 80% of median income. The bill is bipartisan and is a top priority in 2025, if anyone has any interest in advocating for this bill, please do so. If you'd like additional information regarding the bill or help to advocate for the bill, please reach out to the DDD office.

6. Development Initiatives:

- **Central Business District Survey** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on a grant that DDD and the Planning Commission applied for with the State to update the Central Business District Survey, the last survey was created in 2004. Caroline Marse and Jasmine Thomas with the Planning Commission, announced the Planning Commission & DDD were awarded a Historic Preservation Fund Grant in the amount of \$33,910.00. The grant will fund an update to the Central Business District Historic Building Survey. The Planning Commission and DDD will be working with a consultant to complete the work. They are awaiting on the final agreement from the State, and then Metro Council approval. The survey is expected to be completed in September 2025.
- **Prince Masonic Temple** – Wendy Daniels, President & CEO of Beechwood Residential, an affordable housing mixed-income real estate development firm headquartered in Baton Rouge updated the Commission. The Prince Masonic Temple on North Boulevard, is a neoclassical four-story brick building, built in 1926 will be redeveloped into a mixed-use affordable housing complex. Once a vibrant center for Black entertainment, the building has a beautiful ballroom on the 4th floor, where national jazz artists once performed. The project will utilize the low-income housing tax credits, the renovation will create 46 mixed-income units with 1, 2, and 3-bedroom apartments. 36 of the units are affordable to utilize the tax credits to offer the units at an affordable rate. Financing for the project is about \$19 million, about \$1.5 million in conventional loans and \$15 million in low-income & historic tax credits, and \$2 million awarded from the City of Baton Rouge. The first 3 stories, 10 units, of the Masonic Lodge will be renovated, keeping the ballroom as is and 36 units will be new construction. Construction will begin in the first quarter of 2025 and be completed in approximately 16-18 months.
- **Hotel Lincoln** – Wendy Daniels, Beechwood Properties, is working with the Developer Anthony Kimble and updated the Commission. The Hotel Lincoln opened in 1955, was a luxurious hotel hosting 46 rooms with bathtubs and air conditioning throughout the building attracting stars, and famous musicians. The renovation and restoration of the hotel is for a mixed-use development that would host affordable housing units with office spaces for local non-profits. The hotel will have 12 units, the ground floor will be commercial space, and 50% of the units will be affordable. The renovations should begin in the first quarter of 2025.
- **ADA Transition Update** - Jason Crain, MOVEBR Deputy Program Manager for the downtown enhancement projects updated the Commission on the status of the six downtown ADA transition projects.

Downtown ADA Transition Projects

- Florida Street - ADA improvements were completed last year.
- Main Street – Project will be awarded on December 11 at the council meeting. Construction will begin in February or March of 2025.
- East Boulevard - All of the work has been completed. There are two corner ramps on the northwest sides of Mayflower & Europe awaiting AT & T manhole adjustment so the ramps can be built at the proper slope. The contractor is completing the punch list.
- North Boulevard - Under construction and has started sidewalk grinding working block by block. Construction will begin on the north side of North Boulevard and work west toward the river. Work will require temporary closure of on-street parking areas. Work within a block is expected to take 2-4 weeks pending weather. Once the north side is completed, work will move to the south side of North Boulevard and progress east toward I-110.
- Laurel/Lafayette Street – Bids were opened last week, will be awarded in January, and begin construction in March or April
- Planning & design for South Boulevard area is nearly complete.

The South Boulevard Trailhead Connection connects the existing South Boulevard sidewalks over the railroad tracks to the levee trailhead and provides wayfinding signage. This project will increase the safe mobility of pedestrians/bikers and provide connectivity to existing trails and paths. It will also provide better connectivity from the existing paths to the level trail, ultimately connecting the downtown area to LSU. The consultant is working on the 60% plans for this project, there is coordination to do with the railroad for the crossing. Construction should begin in the 2nd quarter of 2025.

For any downtown resident or business having construction-related problems that require urgent attention, call 225-389-3123.

- **Entertainment Study** – Chris Meyer, BRAF CEO, updated the Commission on the Entertainment Study. A year ago, a collaborative music and entertainment study was kicked off. A River Center Oversight Committee was created aimed at enhancing the music and entertainment scene downtown. The committee is made up of key stakeholders of downtown Baton Rouge comprised of Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAAF), Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC), Visit Baton Rouge, the Arts Council, and the Downtown Development District. The committee has been meeting during the past year and below are some of the headlines from the study:
 - A world-class arena that has more than 8,000 attendees
 - Renovations to the River Center to include a headquarters hotel and convention center
 - Plan Baton Rouge III

Three firms out of 23 national/international firms have been selected as finalists for Plan Baton Rouge III which will focus on the intersections of design, public space activation, placemaking, commerce, and mobility to invest in the next chapter of downtown development. On Monday, December 16, at 8:00 a.m. at the Estuary, the three finalists will give their oral presentations.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated Plan Baton Rouge III was one of the major recommendations that came out of the DDD five-year strategic plan. Plan BR I was completed in the 1990s, and Plan BR II in the early 2000s, a lot was accomplished in both plans. There is a blog on the DDD website of what was accomplished in those plans for those interested.

- **DDD Neighborhood Social** – Iboro Udoh updated the Commission on the DDD Neighborhood Social held on October 22, 2024, at the River Center Library. The event took place from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. allowing downtown residents to meet, connect, and socialize with other residents of downtown Baton Rouge. There were fun activities, arts and crafts, and food from Town Square Pizza and Matherne’s. Downtown residents had a chance to share ideas and explore how the downtown neighborhoods can unite to build a stronger and more connected community. Iboro recognized the following downtown businesses that donated items for a raffle :

- LSU Museum of Art
- Live After Five
- The Garden House
- Thirteen Gater
- Manship Theatre
- Old State Capitol
- Baton Rouge Zydeco Hockey Team

The next Neighborhood Social is scheduled for February, 2025. Please subscribe to the DDD Newsletter for further event details such as the location and time.

- **South Baton Rouge Stakeholder Update** – Laticia King with MetroMorphosis briefed the Commission. MetroMorphosis is a local nonprofit organization aimed at transforming communities through resident mobilization; they are the gap between residents and resources. Work in South Baton Rouge began with a partnership with Kimble Properties and MetroMorphosis in hopes of bridging development with the community. They have engaged more than 500 residents through neighborhood conversations, various data collection events, and neighborhood canvassing. Through those engagements, the aspirations of this community is a self-sufficient, thriving community that values its residents, history, arts, and culture, with green spaces and increased homeownership. The community aspiration developed four workgroups:

- Culture and community voice
- Business infrastructure and partnerships
- Public safety and quality of life
- Housing and homeownership

At the heart of their efforts are three key community anchors, the residents, Hotel Lincoln, and the historic Lincoln Theater. The theater will be reborn as a vibrant space connecting the past with the future. The hotel stands as a beacon of hope for redevelopment, offering affordable housing, resource access, and a place for residents to live a high quality of life. Hotel Lincoln will be the Community Resource Hub providing residents with access to services such as affordable housing, healthcare, public

safety, education, and economic development. At the core of it are the residents, whose leadership and vision are driving this work.

- **Downtown Data Update (PlacerAi)** – Casey Tate updated the Commission on downtown event data obtained with PlacerAi, a program DDD has been using to determine how many people visit downtown during certain times. The program can pull traffic pins to see how many impressions one area may get. A traffic pin was pulled at the corner of Third Street and North Boulevard, at the corner of Town Square. In over 12 months there were 1.6 million impressions, which is the number of people who walked, biked, or drove by. The data is used to leverage more funds, maintenance for the area, and promote events and sponsorship. If anyone is interested in pulling data for their business, data such as traffic counts, foot traffic, and event attendance, contact the DDD office.
- **New Businesses:**
 - **City Roots Coffee Two City Plaza, 400 Conventions Street** - City Roots Coffee Bar serves gourmet coffees, desserts and prepared food, as well as beer, wine, and spirits.
 - **The Emporium Signature Spa - 334 N 3rd St** – Faith Miller, owner, stated they are open Tuesday-Sunday from 9:00 am – 7:00 pm and offer massage, esthetics, and wellness services.

8. Events -

Schuyler Olson updated the Commission:

- Kiwanis Christmas Parade - Saturday, December 14, 5:30 pm, beginning at River Center
- Gudn Fest – Saturday, December 14, 11:00 am
- First United Methodist Church – Advent Adventure, Sunday, December 15, 4:00 pm – 8:00 pm, Galvez & Rhorer Plazas
- Red Stick Revelry, December 31, 8:00 pm – 12:00 pm, North Boulevard Town Square
- 8th Annual Taste of the Deep South Festival, October 19 – 20 from 12:00 pm – 8:00 pm, North Boulevard Town Square
- Louisiana Marathon – January 18 -January 19, 4:00 pm Starts at 660 North 4th Street
- Manship Theatre – Movies, Music & more
 - Hit Men
 - Glenn Miller Orchestra
 - Swamp Cows
 - Sweet Honey in the Rock
 - The Grinch
 - Bird
 - Moon Mouse
 - Anthony Devito
- LSU MOA – Current Exhibits
 - Santa’s Art Studio
 - In a New Light: American Impressionism, 1870-1940 – The Marvel of Old Masters, December 13 - Pop-Up Guided Tour
 - In a New Light: American Impressionism 1970-1940, Works from the Bank of America Collection, October 18, 2024 – March 23, 2025
 - Rembrandt, Goya, and Durer: The Marvel of Old Masters October 31, 2024 – February 2, 2025
- Capitol Park Museum – Billy Cannon: They Called Him Legend, Tuesday, December 17, 2024 – Saturday, January 10, 2026
- Old State Capitol – Exhibits and Events

- Remembering the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition – January 23, 2024 – December 20, 2024
- Lawyers Without Rights: Jewish Lawyers in Germany Under the Third Reich, Friday, November 1 – December 21, 2024
- Raising Canes River Center & Theatre –
 - The Nutcracker, December 14 & 15
 - Chicago, December 18
 - Skating on the River, December 12 – January 2
 - Zydeco vs Monroe Moccasins, December 20 & 21
 - Sleeping Beauty, January 8
 - Shen Yun, January 11 & 12
- LASM – Shows and Events
 - Studio Saturday, Boats with Beth Welch, an Oil Painting Workshop
 - Coca-Cola Christmas, a month of magic
- LASM - Changing Exhibitions
 - Discoveries on the Nile: Exploring King Tut’s Tomb & the Amen Egyptian Collection
 - Echoes of Eternity: The Impact of Egyptian Culture on Modern Society
- USS Kidd – Veterans Museum Open Daily from 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM
 - Strong and Calm Warrior Yoga, Saturday, November 8 & December 10 from 8:00 am – 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:

- **Restaurant Pop-Ups: Oni at the Rivermark** – Gary Black with Wampold Companies stated the Pop-Ups at the Rivermark and Two City Plaza have had much success selling out every time.
- **Food & Retail Pop-Up List** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced the DDD is sending out a survey sign-up through the DDD Newsletter to create a list of food and retail list of businesses interested in having a Pop-Up in a downtown space.
- **Plan Baton Rouge III** – Eric Dexter announced the interviews for the three Plan BR III finalists - Sasaki, based out of Denver, SOM, based in Chicago, and WXY, based in New York on Monday, December 16 from 8:00 am – 2:00 pm at the Estuary at the Water Campus. Twenty-three agencies responded to a request to develop the plan. The firms have been selected as finalists to develop a master plan to revitalize and enhance downtown Baton Rouge.

10. Public Comment:

- Jonathon Grimes, President/CEO of the Arts Council, announced MPAC Gala on Friday, January 17, 2025. MPAC serves as the Arts Council’s yearly fundraiser. All proceeds from the event go toward the organization and its mission to foster the creative community through advocacy, events, teaching, and more. The theme this year is “Hollywood”, tickets can be purchased at www.artsbr.org
- Andy Adler with Bank Plus announced Red Stick Revelry Baton Rouge's Official New Year's Eve Celebration. This is the 4th year Bank Plus has sponsored this event. Red Stick Revelry is being held from 8:00 p.m. until Midnight @ Davis Rhorer Plaza.
- Amanda Lanata with Strong Towns Baton Rouge is a volunteer group of citizens looking for small things they can do to improve the City of Baton Rouge. They are partnering with DDD to replant the

downtown planters with seasonal flowers and pick up litter. They will be meeting this Saturday, December 14 @ 12:00 at the DDD Office, 247 Florida Street.

- Cody Scallions, Division Director for the Capital Park Museum, announced a new pop-up exhibition, The American Revolutionary Experience opening today, December 10.
- Dusty Manson with Opera Louisiane announced “Becoming Santa Claus” presented by Opéra Louisiane Two performances: Friday, December 20th - 7:30 pm and Saturday, December 21st - 5:00 pm at the Manship Theatre.
- Leslie Thompson, Director of Sales for the Hilton announced Jingle Bell Brunch with Santa Claus, Sunday, December 17th in our beautiful Heidelberg Ballroom from 11 am - 2 pm
The Hilton Capitol Center will host a New Year’s Eve party with Gatsby-esque glamour and a Dueling Pianos performance from 88ReasonsWhy! The adults-only event begins at 6:30 p.m. for adults 21 and older. Tickets include the performance, dinner, a champagne toast, and a fireworks viewing.
Hilton's Wedding Showcase will bring together local vendors for a one-stop shop to plan your dream day. The event, hosted by the Hilton and Weddings by Allie, starts at 1 p.m. Sunday at the Baton Rouge Hilton Capitol Center. Tickets are \$15-\$25 at Eventbrite.
- Whitney Hoffman Sayal acknowledged and welcomed Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman to the meeting. Councilwoman Coleman stated she was glad to be attending this wonderful platform to find out what is going on in Downtown Baton Rouge.

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