

## **DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES**

February 14, 2023 8:00 AM

River City Branch Library, 250 North Boulevard

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

**Absent:** Mr. Prescott Bailey-Treasurer

**Others in Attendance:** Mary Jane Marcantel, Colleen Rials, Phillip LaFargue, Debra Kastner, Caroline Byrne, Ben Blackwell, Amelia Gabor, Malorey Uzee, Serena Pandos, Kara Rainett, Melanie Couvillion, Samantha Custer, Stephen Saussy, Brandon Blust, Kenyatta Robertson, Chris Chandler, Rannah Gray, C.J. Clones, Luke Lognion, Justin Lemoine, Collin Lindrew, Brooke Guidry, Anna Gasperez, Chuck Booksh, David Jacobs, Diane Zhang, Joshua Combs, Darlene Rowland, Barbara Freiberg, Pam Bordelon, Charles Daniel, Casey Tate, Ute Cress, Morgan Lewis

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting and thanked the River Center Branch Downtown Library for hosting the meeting.

1. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Scott Hensgens made a motion to approve the agenda, Melanie Montanaro seconded and the motion was approved.
3. Scott Hensgens made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 10, 2023 meeting, Jude Melville seconded the motion, and the motion was approved.
4. **Updates from previous Board meeting:**
  - **Capital City Grocery** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the status of the Capital City Grocery store. Some articles in the Business Report reported that Capital City Grocery was closed after changing ownership. Ms. Hoffman Sayal stated the store will be open for this weekend's Spanish Town Mardi Gras parade.
5. **Board Action DDD Carryforward Funds:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal reported the DDD is requesting \$308,000.00 in carry-forward funds from the previous year. Funding will be used for a 5 Year Strategic Plan, and a partnership with the International Downtown Association regarding a report which explores the downtown values, why downtown is important, revenues generated, and all other areas which make downtown an important part of our community. The DDD has been awarded a Transportation Alternatives Grant for bike lanes, sidewalks, and pedestrian improvements on River Road; an engineer will be hired soon to begin the process. Funds will also be used for the Design and Marketing Coordinator position recently filled under contract by Morgan Lewis. The DDD is also

interested in entering a partnership with the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) focusing on the storefronts downtown; identifying those that are vacant, and also identifying any impediments to returning those to commerce and getting businesses in them, focusing on minority and local businesses, as well as anchor tenants. Funds remain from last year for storefront dining grants and that program will continue. DDD was also awarded an Atchafalaya Heritage Foundation for riverfront signage, for which a match is required. In addition, funding is being used to focus on our social media, outdoor furniture that is needed along the riverfront, Third Street design concepts and the I-110 gateway lighting enhancement project. A motion was made by Melanie Montanaro, to approve the carryforward funds, Gary Jupiter seconded the motion. There was no opposition and the motion was approved.

## 6. Governmental Issues:

- **Gary Jupiter, DDD Commission:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal introduced the DDD's new Commission member, Gary Jupiter who is replacing Erin Monroe Wesley's seat. Mr. Jupiter is the area manager for the Courtyard Marriott, Starbucks, and the Hampton Inn & Suites all located downtown. He is also the president of the Baton Rouge Lodging Association and sits on the Visit Baton Rouge Board.
- **Vincent Latino, ACAO:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal wanted to acknowledge that Mayor-President Broome has appointed Vincent Latino as an Assistant Chief Administrative Officer to replace Kelvin Hill. Mr. Latino comes from DPW with some 30 years of experience.

## 7. Development Initiatives:

- A. Strategic Plan Process:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the DDD Strategic Plan. The DDD 5-year Strategic Plan planning process will begin in February. The DDD has contracted with LaFargue, LLC a local planning consultant. Mr. LaFargue gave an overview of the planning process and stated that Mukul Verma will be working with him on the plan. The goal is to have a collaborative effort with input from the stakeholders which are residents, businesses, and partners and visitors. The process is 3 parts, 1) Discovery & Engagement 2) Collaboration and 3) Plan Development. Committees will be formed with stakeholder groups for round table discussions, a survey will be sent out for public input, and individual interviews with the Commission members and key stakeholders will be held. Mr. LaFargue stated he will be attending future DDD meetings with updates. Process expected to be completed late summer.
- B. Downtown Workforce** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated they are working with the state to determine how many people are working from home. Conversations are also being held with the capital city's downtown organizations across the country along with the International Downtown Association to try to determine how to best handle this. A cohort of capital city downtown directors has been formed to determine what they are doing and what the best practices are. Working virtually has impacted communities and downtowns all around the country, some communities worse off than others. Ms. Hoffman Sayal stated she spoke with the folks at Lansing and only 1/3 of their workers have returned which is having devastating

effects on their community. We have heard specifically from the restaurants that they have had lower numbers.

- C. **Commuter Krewe** – Kenyatta Robertson Regional Transportation Safety Coordinator with the Capital Region Planning Commission (CRPC) and Carlington (C.J.) Jones, with AECOM who is a consultant, updated the Commission on the Commuter Krewe. The Krewe is a free commuter program funded by the CRPC whose ultimate mission is to reduce traffic in Baton Rouge. The goal is to help with the reduction of traffic congestion with the interstate construction that is forthcoming. They are working with LSU, Southern, BRCC, technical colleges, AT&T, IBM, and AG, just to name a few, those that are forward-thinking on how to implement alternative transportation to their employees. Through the Commuter Krewe free app, there is carpool matching, vanpool initiatives, and rewards programs or you can go to [www.commuterkrewe.la](http://www.commuterkrewe.la) for this information. Ms. Robertson stated you match yourself with someone you feel comfortable with from work or your neighborhood to ride with. Vanpooling is a benefit for employers when you are on a set time schedule, riders are selected to ride together based on their work schedules, which saves time, and money, and reduces stress. Carpooling may save you 50% of the cost of driving alone, wear and tear, and reduces air pollution and congestion. They are working on funding through the vanpool initiatives to provide subsidies to help reduce your cost when you have 6-7 people riding the van. Branded as a benefit to employers, it's free to you, we draw upon decades of experience and national experts. Assistance with staggered shifts, remote work policy and management, parking and circulation planning, tax benefits, and more. They also have emergency rides home and receive up to 4 reimbursed trips throughout the year for a qualified emergency ride for commuters.
- D. **MOVEBR Update** - Rannah Gray gave an update on the Florida Street ADA improvements, a MOVEBR project, to improve access to Florida Street downtown, which will have some bus rapid transit bus stops. The ADA improvements are primarily sidewalks, crossings, etc. Work has begun between Convention & Florida at the 7th Street intersection, near the Post Office to extend the corner bulb-outs and will be completed very soon. If there are any problems or issues, please call 311, go to [311brla.gov](http://311brla.gov), or submit your request through the 311 app, leave your comments and you will be contacted.
- E. **Downtown Hotels** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on a report that Jake Polansky with BRAC wrote regarding downtown hotels. The report was favorable and showed that downtown had an 81% hotel occupancy rate compared to 71% for all East Baton Rouge Hotels in March, which includes the downtown hotels. The downtown hotel's average rate is \$42.00 to \$56.00 higher than the parish-wide average. The hotel data shows that downtown Baton Rouge is the heart of both the business and visitor community.
- F. **Origin Hotel** – Stephen Saussy, Director of Construction with the Trash Group updated the Commission on the status of the renovations for the Origin Hotel (formerly Holiday Inn Express). The hotel was built in the 1950s and is built like a tank, they are running into a few construction issues with the concrete construction. The hotel will feature a full-service restaurant, a private dining area, a meeting room, 87 rooms, and an addition to the top floor

will have three top-floor suites overlooking the Greenway and a fitness center. Plans are to be open by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter.

## **8. Events -**

Casey Tate updated the Commission on the following events:

- Spanish Town Parade - Saturday, February 18, 12:00 PM
- Mardi Gras Festival – Saturday, February 18, 10:00 AM – 7:00 PM, North Boulevard Town Square
- 225 Fest - Saturday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
- Our Lake of the Lake Half Marathon – Saturday, March 4, North Boulevard Town Square
- Holi Festival – Saturday, March 12, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM, Repentance Park
- Manship Theatre – Pilobolus Big Five-Oh! Saturday, March 4
- LSU MOA – Opening Reception, “I, Too, am Thornton Dial”, March 30-July 2
- LSU MOA – Artist Talk with Kevin Benham, Friday, January 27
- Capital Park Museum – Tuesday – Saturdays 9:00 – 4:00 PM
- Old State Capitol – Tuesday – Friday 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM
- River Center – Parker McCollum, February 24
- River Center Theatre for Performing Arts – Royal Comedy, February 20
- River Center Theatre for Performing Arts – Nate Bargatze, The Be Funny Tour, February 26
- LASM – Mesmerica
- USS Kidd – Open Daily 9:30 AM-3:30 PM
- Red Stick Farmer’s Market – Valentine’s Pop-Up Market, February 14, 11:00 – 1:00 PM
- Red Stick Farmer’s Market – Closed this Saturday due to the Spanish Town Parade  
Every Saturday 8:00-12:00 on the Corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – Every First Saturday of the Month, Corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets

## **9. Commission Announcements & Updates: None**

**10. Public Comment:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal acknowledged State Representative Barbara Freiberg and the Baton Rouge Police Department and thanked them for their attendance.

**11. Meeting Adjourned** – Melanie Montanaro moved to adjourn the meeting, Patrick Michaels seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned.