

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

February 20, 2024

The Rivermark Centre, 451 Florida Street

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

Absent: Mr. Prescott Bailey-Vice Chairman, Ms. Tara Titone

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Morgan Lewis, Ute Cress, Chris Meyer, Luke Lognion, Pam Bordelon, Charles Landry, Chris Meyer, Melissa Parmelee, Laura O'Brien, Derrell Cohoon, Gary Black, Timothy Boone, Dillon Lowe, Kendra Hendricks, Darlene Rowland, Jeffery Leuenberger, Courtney Humphrey, Marcus Bonton, Dee Budgewater, Chris Tooms, Laura O'Brien, Amelia Gabor, Allie Schleter, John O. Hearin, Brian Goad, Field Meng, Gretchen Siemers, Fredrick Sargent

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the and thanked everyone for attending. She introduced Gary Black with Wampold Companies to say a few words. Mr. Black said they are excited to host the meeting at the Rivermark Centre. The top 14 floors of the I Rivermark Centre are residential, with 168 luxury apartments, and are about 75% leased. The DDD meeting is being held in the amenities room, which was recently named the Lee Griffin Amenity Room. The East Plaza has a putting green and pickleball court, a deck and pool on the rooftop, a hot tub, and a fire pit. The building contains 5 floors of office space that includes Chase Bank on the 1st floor and the U.S. Attorney's office on floors 3, 4 & 5. A tour will be provided after the meeting for those who are interested.

1. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Joshua Hollins made a motion to approve the agenda, Philip Jordan seconded, and the motion was approved.
3. Patrick Michaels made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 9, 2024 meeting, Philip Jordan seconded, and the motion was approved.

4. Board Action:

- **DDD Commission Officer Election** – Eric Dexter announced the following DDD Commission 2024 slate of Officers and Board Members as recommended by the Nominating Committee. Chairman, Eric Dexter; Vice Chairman, Prescott Bailey; Treasurer, Patrick Michaels; and Secretary, Gary Jupiter, Board members Tara Titone, Philip Jordan, and Joshua Hollins. A motion was made by Philip Jordan to approve the slate of officers and Board members, seconded by Joshua Hollins, and the motion was approved.

- **2024 Carryforward Funds** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on a proposal to carry forward \$278,642.25 that is available from the 2023 budget. \$110,642 is needed for projects and to finish the initiatives approved last year. The remaining \$168,000 listed below, is for new project initiatives vetted through the planning and projects work group including Commissioners Tara Titone and Patrick Michaels.
 - \$50,000 for a transportation plan
 - \$30,000 for marketing and social media
 - \$15,000 for a project in Beauregard Town for a Civil Rights walls project and recognize T.J. Jemison on that part of the Downtown Greenway,
 - \$34,000 contribution toward the Entertainment Study led by the Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAAF)
 - \$15,000 for a Spanish Town project which is being identified
 - \$15,000 for additional security in the Downtown East neighborhood
 - \$6,500 for updated downtown aerial photography
 - \$2,500.00 for furniture for the DDD staff and office

Ms. Hoffman Sayal introduced Chris Meyer, President & CEO of Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAAF) to give information to the Commission on the proposed \$34,000 for the entertainment study.

Mr. Meyer stated the Arts Council, BRAAF, BRAC, Downtown Development District, & Visit Baton Rouge have discussed how to elevate music and entertainment opportunities in Baton Rouge. Based on a 2023 study by the Baton Rouge Area Chamber, Baton Rouge does not meet the expectations for a city its size in terms of the music and entertainment opportunities it brings to the city. Mr. Meyer stated Baton Rouge does not have the venues to compete with other cities for a thriving entertainment scene. Based on the discussions the organizations had, BRAAF decided to hire a consultant to conduct an entertainment study. Hunden Partners was hired after interviews with other consultant companies.

Hunden Partners' study will focus on the three connected corridors that have the potential to transform downtown and spark a new master plan:

1. LSU Arena
2. River Center Redesign – HQ Hotel, Convention Center, other entertainment/retail
3. Mixed-use districts (LSU, Nicholson, River Center, Memorial Stadium)

Mr. Meyer asked for support from the DDD requesting \$34,000 to participate in the study. The DDD's role will specifically focus on the River Center. All the components will tie together with one comprehensive vision of what the city can do to elevate entertainment.

The study began in 2023 and the initial findings/items anticipated in the study are:

- Baton Rouge can only support one major arena
- The study confirms the CSL study for needed upgrades to the River Center
- Transit connecting corridors
- Downtown quality hotel rooms

Mr. Meyer stated the over-arching point of the study is that it is collaborative and complimentary, and talks about these different assets working in tandem. This study is a great example of partners coming together to produce a much bigger vision. The study also speaks to the need for public/private partnerships, not taxes, to pay for new entertainment venues. Hunden Partners has worked with hundreds of cities across the country using new and innovative financing tools to partner with the private and public sectors to create amazing assets for the community. The plan is expected to be complete in April, 2024.

Eric Dexter stated the action item is to approve the proposed funds for the projects in the carry-forward amount of \$278,642.25 for 2024. Patrick Michaels made a motion to approve the carry-forward funds of \$278,642.25 as presented to the Commission, Philip Jordan seconded, Eric Dexter abstained, there was no opposition and the motion was approved.

5. Governmental Issues:

- **DDD Project Development Director, Ibora Udoh** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal introduced Ibora Udoh as the newly hired DDD Development Project Director. Mr. Udoh graduated from LSU in Graphic Design with a Master’s in Architecture. He is married and has three young children.

6. Update from the Previous Board Meeting

- **Downtown Greenway/Louisiana Avenue & 14th Street** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. The second phase of the Louisiana & 14th Street improvements for handicap ramps and crosswalks has been ongoing and the project is approximately 45% complete. On Eddie Robinson and Louisiana Avenue, there will be ramps, sidewalks, and wayfinding signs to finalize the connection between the end of the Government Street Bike Lanes and the Downtown Greenway at T.J. Jemison.
- **Florida Corridor Plan** – Kendra Hendricks, Director of Operations and Programs of Build Baton Rouge updated the Commission and showed slides, via PowerPoint, on the process of the project. An open house was recently held to showcase the 6 neighborhood centers along the corridor; the I-110 stitch which includes downtown, Mid City, Foster and Florida, Bon Carre, Cortana, and Sherwood Forest. There is a survey at www.floridacorridorbr.com to provide feedback on the type of development that you envision can be implemented at each opportunity site. Another open house will be held in mid-April to discuss the findings.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated she has been participating in the meetings on the Advisory Committee. One slide illustrates the existing zoning & assets of the 1-110 “Stich” area which encompasses downtown and includes areas east and west of I-110 and is considered “socially vulnerable”. It is exciting to see some effort and focus in that area. Downtown is hosting the 225 Fest this Sunday, February 25 with an opportunity for public input on this project.

- **Event Data** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on downtown event data with Placer.ai, a program DDD has been using to determine how many people are visiting downtown during certain times. The DDD tracked the event data for the Night Market event and Spanish Town Mardi Gras parade. Over 10,600 people attended the Night Market event held Friday

night February 9, in the Central Green, and over 127,800 attended the Spanish Town Mardi Gras parade held on Saturday, February 10.

7. Development Initiatives:

- **IDA Top Issue Council** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced she was selected by the International Downtown Association to participate in the Downtown Top Issues Council, a strategic research initiative that brings together industry leaders to produce research briefs on top urban issues. The briefs should be completed sometime this summer.
- **IDA Value Report** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the International Downtown Association (IDA) Value Report which compares Downtown Baton Rouge with other comparable downtown areas. Nashville, Milwaukee, and New Haven were other cities that participated in the study. According to the IDA report Downtown Baton Rouge is considered an emerging downtown, considered to have substantial potential for growth. The study looks at five principles that create the downtown value: economy, inclusion, vibrancy, identity, and resilience.
 - **Downtown Economy** – Downtowns are valuable due to their role as economic anchors for the region. Downtown Baton Rouge occupies less than 5% of the city’s land area but employs 20% of citywide jobs, 17% of knowledge jobs, and 29% of creative jobs. Downtown property values are 2.5x higher than the parish-wide average. The occupancy rates for offices, hotels, and residential are high reflecting downtown as a place to “live, work, and play”.
 - **Inclusion** – As the literal and figurative heart of their cities, downtowns represent and welcome residents, employees, and visitors from all walks of life. Downtown is balanced in regards to the distribution of ages, with an increase in the share of residents aged 25-34 and “empty nesters” over the past decade. 70% of the residents are African American/Black and the majority of workers are Caucasian/White. Downtown age diversity is extremely high, being one of the most diverse in terms of age of all the downtowns studied. The median household income downtown shows drastic differences between the east and west sides of the interstate.
 - **Vibrancy** – The ability of vibrant places to attract visitors and new residents, as well as a region-wide consumer base, creates value. Residential population growth has increased an average of 16.4% over the last 10 years, outpacing EBR Parish's growth rate of 4%, and is comparable with the other emerging downtowns. Downtown retail sales account for 4.6% of citywide retail sales, compared to 6% of other emerging downtowns. This shows a huge opportunity for additional retail because it can be supported based on the rising residential and visitor base. Downtown is doing well with events and activities such as farmer’s markets, entertainment, conventions, festivals, outdoor events, and venues with live entertainment. There are 7 hotels downtown with 1,175 hotel rooms, other emerging downtowns on average have 15 hotels with 3,638 hotel rooms.

- **Identity** – Downtowns often serve as iconic symbols of their cities, creating a strong sense of place that enhances local pride. Downtown has unique features and destinations with 27 historic structures, 8 museums, 17 parks and natural areas, and 44 public art installations. Social media has been enhanced in the past year with posts, impressions, and followers with information that downtown has to offer.
- **Resilience** – Downtowns play a crucial role in building stability, sustainability, and prosperity for the city and region. The mobility score is on par with other emerging downtowns for walkability-79 and bike-ability-66, exceeding the city’s averages of 39 & 44, respectively. Downtown commuting for biking, transit, carpooling, and walking is significantly higher than in the city and parish.

Baton Rouge is categorized as “emerging” comparing to Birmingham, Tulsa, Toledo, Tampa, and Cleveland’s downtown districts. Downtown Baton Rouge is comparable in residential growth and employment with the other emerging downtowns. In summary, the key points from the report are the social divide created by the interstate on East & West 1110, the need for retail, bringing the community together through diversity and community events, and the influx of residential growth. The report provides a lot of data and validates other DDD initiatives already underway. For additional information, the report will be online at www.downtownbatonrouge.org later today.

Eric Dexter asked Whitney Hoffman Sayal what the plans are to increase the retail and hotels downtown. Ms. Hoffman Sayal stated the DDD is working on a retail initiative with BRAC to do a better job of attracting businesses downtown. In regards to the hotels, it would have to be further studied how the other emerging downtowns have attracted more hotels, take those learning objectives, and develop a game plan for hotel growth. Based on the IDA data showing residential and visitor growth there are good opportunities for both hotel and retail to do well.

Joshua Hollins asked how the data in the IDA report will help the DDD to use this information to select projects going forward within the geographical bounds of the downtown and uplift for sustainability. Ms. Hoffman Sayal mentioned the Strategic Plan includes transportation and housing plans, in which the carryforward funds, approved today, initiate the transportation plan. Using those funds for what has already begun with the Louisiana Connector and identifying additional projects for a better transportation system. A study is needed to analyze the one-ways in and out of downtown, and the bicycle/pedestrian master plan, to identify projects to apply for additional grants.

- **LACDB/DDD Website** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced the Louisiana Commercial Database (LACDB) is now linked and embedded on the DDD website which allows you to view all commercial properties available for sale or rent downtown on an interactive map. The program saves an incredible amount of staff time from entering all of the information onto the DDD website. If there are property owners who are not listed on LACDB but would like to be included on the DDD website, contact our office and we can list the property.
- **Downtown Lighting** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the lighting upgrades. Part of the strategic plan was to upgrade the lighting downtown. The City-Parish in

conjunction with Entergy upgraded the lights on Third Street to LED fixtures from North Boulevard to North Street. Thanks to DPW Transportation Drainage, the Mayor's office, and Entergy for helping with that initiative and 5th District BRPD for marking the poles where the lights were out in the rest of the DDD that have been fixed. There were also a few lights out owned by City-Parish that Traffic Engineering repaired, so thanks to them and Iboro Udoh for collaborating to have them replaced.

8. Events -

Casey Tate updated the Commission on the following events:

- 225 Fest – Sunday, February 25th @ 12:00 PM, 660 North 4th Street
- Holi Fest – Saturday, March 9th @ 2:00 PM, Repentance Park
- City Year Event – School House Rock Fest, Saturday, March 9 @ 4:00 PM, Galvez Plaza
- YMCA Corporate Cup 5K Run/Walk – Saturday, March 23rd @ 9:00 AM
- Red Beans and Rice Festival – Saturday, March 23rd @ 12:00 PM, Rhorer Plaza
- American Heart Walk – Saturday, April 6th @ 9:30 AM, Rhorer Plaza
- Manship Theatre – Movies, Music & more for March
- LSU MOA – Artist Talk & Reception: Daniel Rozin, Thursday, February 29th @ 6:00 PM
- Capitol Park Museum – Mythologies, Louisianaises
- Old State Capitol –
 - The Dawn of Black Suffrage, Tuesday, February 27th
 - Easter Egg Roll, Sunday, March 3rd
 - Women's History Month, Guest Speaker Chief Justice Bernette Johnson, March 23rd
- River Center – 44th Annual LA Sportsman Show, Hockey, Bluey & More
- LASM – Highlighted Galleries
- USS Kidd – Veterans Museum Open Daily from 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – First Saturday of the month, March 2nd
- Red Stick Farmer's Market – Every Saturday 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
 - February 24th – Glass Recycling Drop Off, Glassroots Initiative

9. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- Eric Dexter stated to get updates on events and festivals being held downtown, sign up to receive weekly emails from the DDD on their website at www.downtownbatonrouge.org

10. Public Comment:

- Luke Lognion of BRASS, the Managing Director of the Baton Rouge Arts Market, (BRAM) announced the Northwestern State Jazz Orchestra will be playing at the Arts Market on March 2nd. Live After Five dates and bands will be announced later at the end of the month, as always "Shop Local".
- Allie Schleter, Community Engagement Coordinator for BREADA announced they will be partnering with Glassroots to open a free glass drop-off at the Red Stick Farmers Market at 5th St. and Main St. from 8 am-12 pm on the last Saturday of every month. Glassroots' initiative utilizes a six-step method to collect glass bottles and convert them into sand and glass cullet used for coastal restoration and protection, disaster relief, eco-construction, art, and more. Just make sure the glass is washed out and without lids or corks.

- Amelia Gabor with CPEX announced the Smart Growth Summit to be held on April 25 & 26 at the Manship Theatre. Continuing Education Credits will be offered for professionals. Kona A. Gray will be the keynote speaker. Additional information and registration can be found at <https://summit.cpex.org/registration>.
- Pam Bordelon with the Arts Council announced the Blue Note Records 85th Anniversary Celebration, starring the Blue Note Quintet, which will be held at the Manship Theatre on March 6th. Additionally, Branford Marsalis will receive the Alvin Batiste Hall of Distinction award. Beginning April 7, Sunday in the Park begins.
- Dee Budgewater, President & CEO Of Louisiana Lighthouse, announced a brunch fundraiser for the Baton Rouge location on April 26 at the Capitol Park Museum.
- Melissa Parmelee with St. James Episcopal Church, announced the 72nd Annual Gumbo beginning this Friday, February 23 will be serving gumbo for take-out and drive-thru, and on Friday, March 8, they will have dine-in and drive-thru gumbo. Additional information can be found on the website at www.stjamesgumbo.square
- Chris Tooms with Helix Academy wanted to promote two programs for the students. One is the Corporate Work Study Program, where a student shadows a business owner. The other is the Young Entrepreneurs Academy, offering students to start their own businesses, if anyone is interested, please contact Helix Academy.
- Laura O'Brien, District Executive of the YMCA, invited everyone to participate in the Corporate Cup on March 23 for the YMCA Corporate Cup 5K and 1 Mile Run/Walk and Jambalaya Cook-Off.

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