

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

June 11, 2024

Capitol Park Museum, 660 N. 4th Street

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

Absent: Mr. Prescott Bailey-Vice Chairman, Mr. Gary Jupiter-Secretary, Ms. Tara Titone, Mr. Philip Jordan

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Amanda Richter, Gabriella Duvall, Wayne Gross, Brige Goffrey, Elizabeth McKinley, Reginal Brumfield, Kim Mascagni, Jordan Arceneaux, Marty Engquist, Jonathan Grimes, Anne Mahoney, Renee Amar, Roy Miller, Yolandre McCray, Allie Schleter, Kevin Cunningham, Charles Daniel, James Avault, Darlene Rowland, Lane Pitre, Luke Lognion, Mark Martin, Melinda Robinson, Justin Lemoine, Caroline Cassagne, Collin Lindrew, T.C. Lam, Jasmine Thomas, Bobbi Wisekal, Landon Hester, Amelia Gabor, Vince Piquett, Sarah Nichols, Kristen Guarisco, Mahalie Kyzar, Laura O'Brien, Karen Soniat, Councilwoman Carolyn R. Coleman, Shawn O'Brien.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting at the Capitol Park Museum and encouraged them to visit the museum and the exhibits after the meeting.

1. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order. He stated there was no quorum present, so they could not adopt the agenda and minutes from the previous meeting. However, they would do so if another commissioner arrived before the end of the meeting. Otherwise, the minutes will be approved at the next Commission meeting on August 13.

2. Governmental Issues:

- **Historic Preservation Committee (HPC) -2-24, 103 France Street** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. The HPC has a request for the demolition of two buildings at 103 France Street in the Downtown Development District. Demolitions within the original DDD boundary require any building over 50 years old to have the approval of the Historic Preservation Committee. A meeting of the HPC is scheduled for tomorrow, Wednesday, June 12 at 8:30 a.m. at the Planning Commission.
- **River Center Steering Committee** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission and stated that Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome's strategic plans for the redevelopment of the River Center are located online at www.brla.gov/rivercenterproposal. 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 organizations being represented on the Steering Committee are:

- Metro Council District 10
- Visit Baton Rouge
- Arts Council
- Baton Rouge Area Chamber
- Baton Rouge Area Foundation
- Build Baton Rouge
- Downtown Development District
- Hospitality Representative
- North Baton Rouge Economic Development District

There are two items for public hearing on the June 26th Metropolitan Council agenda. One item is the proposed Strategic Plan for the Redevelopment of the River Center Complex and the development of a Headquarters Hotel, the other item is to execute a contract for professional legal services.

- **Mayor-President Youth Workforce Experience** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced the DDD is participating in the Mayor-President’s Youth Workforce Experience as a WorkPlace Mentor. The Mayor’s Youth Workforce Experience creates a pathway to success by providing young adults with a chance to discover interests and build skills. Ryan Crowder, a senior at Arlington Preparatory Academy is a summer intern working at the DDD.

5. Update from the Previous Board Meeting

- **USS KIDD Departure** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the departure of the USS Kidd on April 25. The USS Kidd is being brought to Houma, LA for much-needed repairs and restoration. The U.S.S. Kidd is expected to be absent from downtown for at least a year returning in the spring of 2025.
- **Louisiana/Eddie Robinson, Sr. Drive Street Project** – 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 has been completed. Iboro Udoh with DDD is working on a punch list with the contractor. On Eddie Robinson and Louisiana Avenue, ramps, sidewalks, and wayfinding signs will finalize the connection between the end of the Government Street Bike Lanes and the Downtown Greenway at T.J. Jemison.
- **Ai Update – 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 visit downtown during certain times. The Commission viewed a “heat map” that shows the number of visits in a 12-month area downtown. The Rivermark Centre which opened last fall and the Hilton Capital Center were the hot spots and a lot of activity along 3rd Street and the River Center. The Old State Capitol, the Queen Casino, McDonald’s, and the Pastime restaurant also had high activity. The Blues Fest was a 3-day event that generated 80,000 visitors downtown, Redstick Farmers Market had an average of 2,500 visitors on Saturday mornings, and the Live After Five concert series generated an average of 5,000 visitors per concert.

- **Cleanest City Contest State Award** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced Baton Rouge won the Cleanest City Contest State Award in Category J – cities with over 100 thousand population. DDD hosts the Louisiana Garden Club Federation every year when they tour Baton Rouge. The majority of the tour is in the downtown and LSU areas. The DDD has been working with the City’s Department of Maintenance to enhance the beautification of downtown with landscaping and street sweepers around Town Square and the 19th Judicial District Court area.

6. Development Initiatives:

- **Riverfront Study Open House Recap** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the Riverfront Study Open House held on May 14 with LSU highlighting the work of the LSU Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture fourth-year students. The students exhibited their ideas on how to provide visitors and citizens with more quality of life experiences and increase tourism to the region. The DDD also provided examples of how other cities have enhanced their waterfront, in addition to cities that have improved their convention centers. The LSU landscape architecture 4th-year students drafted plans to revitalize the riverfront to reconnect the urban landscape of Downtown Baton Rouge with the river. Plans for the riverfront area included a shipping container plaza, a terraced garden, and a lawn amphitheater between the current riverfront dock and the U.S.S. Kidd Museum. Materials and plans from the open house are displayed in the back of the room for viewing after the meeting, including photos of riverfront convention centers and riverfront precedents from other cities. The DDD has a survey out for feedback as to what people would like to see on the riverfront. If you have the opportunity, please take the survey, there are flyers in the back of the room to take back to your offices to share with your colleagues.
- **Downtown Breakdown** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the DDD weekly newsletter. The newsletter has been reformatted to highlight more than just events happening downtown. A blog called the Downtown Breakdown has been created highlighting news, statistics, population, residential living, new businesses, and other topics related to downtown. If you aren’t receiving the newsletters, please join our mailing list on our website at www.downtownbatonrouge.org
- **Capitol Lakes** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission. Ethan Bergeron an LSU 5th-year landscape architecture student, worked at DDD as an intern and has recently graduated. In addition to the Riverfront Study, he worked on his 5th year LSU Capstone Project on how to restore the Capitol Lakes for better use for the community; the Capitol Lakes has been designated as a superfund clean-up area with the EPA. He explored the history, received feedback from locals, and envisioned a new life for the Lakes. The Commission viewed a video on Ethan’s final presentation of the Capitol Lakes project showing how the lakes can be restored. The DDD would like to thank Ethan for his work on the Capitol Lakes and Riverfront projects, as well as the years of help he has provided this office as an intern.
- **Louisiana Economic Development (LED) Building** - Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced that Louisiana Economic Development is moving its headquarters from 3rd Street to 702 River Road, previously the home to the Capitol Park Welcome Center.

- **New Businesses:**

- O’Haras Irish Pub (Formerly Happy’s), 136 Third Street – Open Tuesday – Sunday 3:00 p.m. – 2:00 a.m.
- Sweet Fern Landscapes, 120 S. 14th Street – They grow Indigenous plants used in projects around the state.
- Violet, a luxury nightclub on the ground floor, and Second Story an intimate craft cocktail bar, 214 Third Street opening soon
- Louisiana Motor Transportation Association (LMTA), 325 & 329 Florida Street
- Town Square Pizza, 321 North Boulevard extends hours. Monday – Saturday 11:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

8. Events -

Casey Tate updated the Commission:

- Best of 225 Awards Party Thursday, June 27th, 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. @ 1717 at the Queen Casino Baton Rouge
- Pride Festival – Raising Cane’s River Center, Saturday, June 29th, 12:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- USSSA Baseball All-Star World Opening Ceremony July 9th Galvez Plaza
- Hotter than Hades Happy’s 5000 & Beer Mile, 222 North Boulevard, Saturday, July 27th @ 5:00
- Manship Theatre – Movies, Music & more June – August
 - Robin Barnes,
 - That 70’s Band
 - Improv Comedy
 - A Thousand Horses
 - Yesterday and Today
 - Amanda Show
 - Sierra Green
 - Chuck Leavell
- LSU MOA – Current Exhibits
 - Art in Louisiana: Views into the Collection
 - Fierce Planets: Work from the Studio Art Quilt Associates
 - One Stitch at a Time: Southern Vernacular Quilts
- LSU MOA – Events
 - A Joyful Noise Juneteenth Celebration, Friday, June 14 @ 6:30 p.m.
 - Astronomy on Tap, Thursday, June 27th from 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
- Capitol Park Museum – Lunchtime Lagniappe with Andre St. Romaine, Wednesday, July 31 from 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.
- Old State Capitol – Exhibits and Events
 - Bridging the Mississippi: Spans Across the Father of the Waters June 8 -October 5
 - Photographer Talk: Philip Gould – “Bridging the Mississippi” Tuesday, June 25
 - Author’s Talk with Michael H. Rubin, Sunday, July 7
- Raising Canes River Center – BR Pride, Bayou Motor Fest, The Duck Hunters Expo & more!
- LASM – Studio Saturday: Botanical Painting Art Workshop, Dino Day, Family Hour Stargazing, Read and Create
- USS Kidd – Veterans Museum Open Daily from 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM
 - Strong and Calm Warrior Yoga, Saturday, July 6 from 8:00 – 9:30 AM
 - D-Day Exhibit entire month of June

- 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 the new LASM Director, Dr. Karen M. Soniat. Dr. Soniat was previously with the National WWII Museum in New Orleans as Associate Vice President for Annual Giving and Membership.
- Whitney Hoffman Sayal introduced the new Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge President, Mr. Jonathan Grimes. Mr. Grimes has been with the Arts Council for 16 years and is excited to be selected for this leadership role.

10. Public Comment:

- Dr. Bobbi Wisekal, Director of Baton Rouge Pride Fest announced that BR Pride Fest, a free event, will be held in the Raising Canes River Center on June 29, from 12:00 PM – 7:00 PM with a schedule of events including Opera Louisiane, the BR Symphony, and Taylor Dane.
- Ms. Rene Amar with the Louisiana Motor Transport Association (LMTA) announced they purchased the former location of Café Mimi’s at 325 & 329 Florida on March 1 of this year. LMTA is a trucking industry group and plans to move its offices there and open a truck museum to promote transportation jobs to young people. The plan is to move the association’s offices to the second floor of 325 Florida and be open on July 1. LMTA is working with an architect to turn the bottom floor at 328 Florida into a trucking museum in the next 1-2 years. The goal of the museum is to make it easier to recruit new drivers to overcome massive workforce shortages.
- Luke Lognion, Director of Live Afer Five announced it is officially over. There were over 5,000 average in attendance at each concert. The largest crowds were for Kenny Neal and The Michael Foster Project with 7,000 in attendance. The Baton Rouge Arts Market, where local artists and makers sell quality, handmade goods is held on the first Saturday of the month in conjunction with the Farmer’s Market.

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