

## **DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES**

November 14, 2023, 8:00 AM

The Queen Casino, Cypress Room, 1717 River Road

**Board Members in Attendance:** Mr. Eric Dexter-Chairman, Mr. Patrick Michaels-Secretary, Mr. Gary Jupiter, Ms. Tara Titone, Mr. Joshua Hollins, Mr. Philip Jordan

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

**Others in Attendance:** Trevor Haynes, Chip Beyt, Reed Richard, Chuck Booksh, Eve Guilbault, Lauren Lamber Tompkins, Miranda Barcelona, Barry Gambold, David Kors, Edwin Beraud, Samantha Morgan, Jonathan Grimes, David Jacobs, Jason Langlois, Nester Rodriguez, Landon Hester, Brooke Goodrich, Rannah Gray, Ike Thrasher, Judy Foust, Laura O'Brien, Braylon Hyde, Pam Bordelon, Rob Miller, Luke Lognion, Darlene Rowland, Gary Black, Charles Daniel, Carolyn Coleman, Brian Goad, Nita Mitchell, Field Meng, Shaun Breaux, Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Morgan Lewis, Casey Tate, Ute Cress

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone and thanked everyone for attending. Mrs. Hoffman Sayal introduced Matt Shehadi, General Manager of The Queen BR. Mr. Shehadi said they are very excited to host the DDD's Commission meeting this month. This is an \$85 million investment The Queen Gaming Entertainment made in Downtown Baton Rouge. Also, they do have another project they own, the Belle of Baton Rouge, which they plan on renovating beginning the first quarter of 2024. This will be another great investment in Downtown Baton Rouge with an estimated cost of over \$100 million. The Queen has 731 slots, 18 table games, the 1717 Restaurant – a hidden gem, Shaq's Big Chicken which has been a huge success, and a 3 Woks Noodle Bar on the gaming floor doing tremendous as well. They are excited about what they are bringing to downtown, continuing to grow the business. The September numbers showed the casino market increased 90.2% generating growth for Downtown Baton Rouge. Mr. Shehadi stated they have about 6,500 square feet of event space, and live entertainment every Friday night through December.

1. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Gary Jupiter made a motion to approve the agenda, Patrick Michaels seconded, and the motion was approved.
3. Patrick Michaels made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 12, 2023 meeting, Philip Jordan seconded, and the motion was approved.
4. **Board Action:**
  - **DDD Officers** – Eric Dexter explained Jude Melville, who was the Vice-Chairman, resigned due to work obligations, therefore a new Vice Chairman needs to be selected. Prescott Bailey was

nominated as Vice Chairman, Patrick Michaels as Treasurer, Gary Jupiter as Secretary, and Eric Dexter as Chairman. Philip Jordan made a motion to approve the 2023-2024 DDD Commission Officers as presented, Gary Jupiter seconded and the motion was adopted.

## 5. Governmental Issues:

- **New DDD Commissioners** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal introduced the newly appointed DDD Commissioners, Ms. Tara Titone representing Beauregard Town, Mr. Philip Jordan with b1Bank representing the property owners, and Mr. Joshua Hollins representing BRAC.
- **2024 City-Parish Budget** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated in August the DDD Commissioners approved the 2024 Budget, which is incorporated in the overall City-Parish Budget. The Mayor-President introduced the City-Parish Budget to the Council in November and a special meeting will be held on December 12, to approve the Budget.
- **BRPD 5<sup>th</sup> District, 24-hour** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced downtown now has 24-hour/7 days a week BPRD 5<sup>th</sup> District police presence. Previously there was a gap in the late-night shift, where another police district would cover downtown.

## 6. Update from the Previous Board Meeting

- **Downtown Charles Lamar YMCA 24/7** – Laura O’Brien, District Executive YMCA, announced that the Downtown Charles Lamar location is now open 24/7. Ms. O’Brien stated they have 89 memberships downtown and have given the downtown Police Officers free memberships. Current Y Members can become 24-hour members for an additional \$5 a month which can be used at the Dow location or Downtown Baton Rouge. The YMCA has a lot of people who come in between 3:00 & 4:00 a.m. and then later after 8:00 p.m. They have updated the camera security system, making it more secure. The YMCA has 8 locations throughout the Baton Rouge area.

## 7. Development Initiatives:

- **2023 International Downtown Association Conference** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. Mrs. Hoffman Sayal stated she and her assistant, Casey Tate, attended the 2023 International Downtown Association Conference in Chicago in October. Many of the topics discussed were related to the DDD’s Strategic Plan. Much of the conversation was about the “general health” of downtowns across the country & the world. Many cities are seeing an increase in residential, there is advocacy to find incentives to help convert some of the empty office space into residential to keep central business districts healthy. Downtown Baton Rouge doesn’t show signs of having problems with office occupancy. Another topic was media relations; since the pandemic, there has been a spotlight on downtowns across the nation in the news. The media conversations usually point out the negative, therefore, thinking about how we market and present data that breaks those misconceptions is also part of our strategic plan. There are federal funding availabilities, specifically the Reconnecting Communities Grant to help break the barriers the interstates created years ago. There was a tour of experimental

retail initiatives, even cities like Chicago which have high foot traffic are experiencing a decline in retail and finding some creative strategies to deal with that. Casey Tate added, that keeping in line with the DDD strategic plan, he focused on clean and safe, marketing communications, and working with the City-Parish Government.

- **Downtown Greenway Louisiana Connector Ribbon Cutting** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on a ribbon cutting ceremony today at 4:00 p.m. for the Downtown Greenway Louisiana Connector, everyone is welcome to attend. The Louisiana Connector connects the Government Street bike lanes to the Downtown Greenway.
- **Riverfront Wayfinding** – The Commission viewed images, via PowerPoint, of riverfront wayfinding signage that has been updated. Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated that 15 wayfinding signs were updated primarily along the riverfront. There are many wayfinding signs to help visitors and guests navigate around downtown. The signs needed replacement due to weathering and updating as development occurs.
- **Louisiana State Capitol Grounds Landscaping** – Chip Beyt with Reich Landscape Architecture briefed the Commission on updating the grounds and landscaping at the Louisiana State Capitol. The gardens were initially installed in 1932, in 1977 the gardens were reported to be in decline, in 1982 the capitol and park received a National Landmark designation, and in 1993 a comprehensive tree replacement was executed. The goal is to restore the gardens to the original traditional English design. The gardens are expected to be completed by the Governor's Inauguration in January 2024.
- **Main Street Market Renovations** – Darlene Rowland, BREADA Executive Director, updated the Commission. Ms. Rowland stated construction began last week on Main Street Market. Main Street Market opened 22 years ago with an innovative private/public partnership between the State of LA, BRAF, and BREADA. The market will be renovated with modern amenities which includes renovating the 4 single-stall restrooms into two dedicated men's and women's 3-stall restrooms and retaining one of the original stalls as a family restroom. BREADA will have a program space in the facility. Main Street Market operates 6 days a week and holds the Farmer's Market on Saturdays. With this renovation, the BREADA Board was focused on connecting the two markets more closely with BREADA's mission allowing for farm-to-table cooking classes, gardening classes, etc. The renovations are expected to take 6 months, the facility is closed during this time. The Farmer's Market will continue to operate every Saturday and guests can utilize restrooms inside the parking garage. BREADA just celebrated its 27<sup>th</sup> Anniversary last weekend and is excited to be part of downtown and offer events every weekend.
- **Rivermark Centre Grand Opening** – Gary Black, Wampold Property Manager, updated the Commission. The Rivermark held their grand opening gala at the end of October with a tour of the building. Construction had been undergoing for about 3 years. Guests were shown the residential units, commercial office space, east and west outdoor plaza, and a rooftop amenity with a pool. There are a couple of contiguous floors with office space available with a beautiful view and approximately 100 residential units have been leased and every unit has a large

balcony. Mr. Black stated there is a 2400 square-foot indoor/outdoor space on the first floor earmarked for food and beverage. Mr. Black invited anyone who hasn't seen the building, to please contact them, and ask for a tour.

- **Origin Hotel** – Nester Rodriguez, Director of Sales, and Braylon Hyde, General Manager updated the Commission on the status of the Origin Hotel. Mr. Rodriguez gave a history of Origin Hotels, and the brand's purpose, and showed a rendering of the hotel on North Boulevard (formerly Holiday Inn Express) Origin believes connecting with people and the community is very important. The hotel will have 87 guest rooms with 4 luxury suites, two ballrooms, an on-site restaurant and bar – Passe, 1700 square feet of meeting and event space, and an outdoor roof deck event space. The hotel is convenient to downtown locations such as LSU, Raising Canes River Center, and both state capital buildings. The property is pet friendly, with valet parking and Wyndham rewards programs. The Passe restaurant is an American dinner with a touch of French, please follow us on Instagram @passe\_batonrouge. Origin Hotel has partnered with local partnerships such as Sweet Baton Rouge which will be a vendor inside the hotel, and Leela Yoga will be providing yoga to guests and staff members three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays. The hotel is expected to open in January 2024.
- **Lincoln Theatre** – Franklin Lassiter, F.L. Lassiter and Associates, updated the Commission on the status of the renovations to the Lincoln Theater located at 1305 Myrtle Walk Street. The theatre was built in the 1950s and has been dormant for about 20 years. The Lincoln Theater has been a movie and entertainment showplace for Baton Rouge's African-American community for decades. Phase 1 of the renovation was completed which included a new air conditioning, heating & ventilation system for the building. Phase I also went toward making the space compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Phase II will incorporate renovations and remodeling of the existing building, an addition that will include a new lobby, restrooms, and stairs to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. The second floor will house offices, an arts theatre, an art collection, and a museum area. The project was bid @ \$ 3 million and a contractor is being awarded. The contractor will begin construction in December 2023 and the project should be completed by November/December of next year. Once fully restored, the Lincoln Theater will be home to the Louisiana Black History Hall of Fame where exhibits showcasing arts, entertainment, history, and culture will live.
- **Baton Rouge Rotary Speaker** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated she presented to the Rotary Club of Baton Rouge a few weeks ago implementing some of the strategic plan initiatives which was sharing some of the data for downtown to begin the narrative accurately. Nationally everyone is looking at downtown central business district occupancy rates. Downtown Baton Rouge occupancy rates are doing well with Class A @ 83.13% and Class B/C at 95.98%. State and Federal rehabilitation tax credits that were in place before the pandemic and the conversion of office space into residential at the Rivermark Centre helped with the overall occupancy rates, outperforming the rest of the Parish. Downtown Baton Rouge also outperformed the rest of the Parish in hotel occupancy and average daily rates. Mrs. Hoffman Sayal also took the opportunity to tell them about a retail survey the DDD recently launched. This survey is in

partnership with the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) working on a retail initiative to fill storefront spaces. She encouraged everyone to take this survey to help us understand what kind of retail is wanted by residents, visitors, and workers downtown.

- **BREC Imagine Your Parks 3** – Reed Richard, Assistant Superintendent of System Planning updated the Commission. BREC creates and implements a strategic plan every ten years to guide the progress of the system. BREC implemented the "Imagine Your Parks" strategic plan which was created after a year and a half of surveys, community meetings, brainstorming sessions, and public planning meetings. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> decade of Imagine Your Parks which began in 2005 with Imagine Your Parks I. The results transformed the parks system in East Baton Rouge Parish featuring 12 new community parks, five dog parks, Liberty Lagoon Water Park, skateboard parks, fishing ponds, and much more. Imagine Your Parks2 established eight strategic directions for BREC to focus on in the next decade and lays out an action plan for getting there. The largest project which will be completed next year is the Greenwood Park and Baton Rouge Zoo. Imagine Your Parks 3 will be a roadmap for the next 10 years based on our vision that the community sees. The first community workshop was held last week and plan on having more after the first of the year. Part of the vision is primarily going to be based on a more equitable system for the next 10 years. The four key focus areas are resilience, accessibility, safety, and quality. 50% of the respondents to some of the surveys say safety and security are the biggest barriers that keep people coming to the parks and should be the primary focus. To learn more about the master plan and schedule go to [www.brec.org](http://www.brec.org). Mr. Reed stated BREC will be focusing on more of a presence downtown in the next 10 years. Whitney Hoffman Sayal mentioned BREC had an award-winning year being awarded with the National Gold Medal Award, for the best large park system in the nation.

## 8. Events -

Casey Tate updated the Commission on the following events:

- Turkey Trot 5K - Thursday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 368 Convention Street
- Festival of Lights - Friday, December 1<sup>st</sup> from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., Town Square
- FUMC Christmas Concert - Sunday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at 4:00 p.m. Town Square
- Christmas Parade - Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30 p.m.
- Manship Theatre –
  - Todd Barry Half Joking Tour, November 17 @ 7:30 p.m.
  - Cool Winter Nights and Hot Jazz, December 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> @ 7:30 p.m.
- LSU MOA –
  - Andy Warhol “Friends & Frenemies” Pop Party, January 18<sup>th</sup> @ 6:00 p.m.
  - Access for All Day, coming in 2024 every first Sunday
- Capitol Park Museum – Lunchtime Lagniappe: James Linden Hogg, November 22<sup>nd</sup> from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.
- Old State Capitol –
  - Iconic JFK Moments – Through the Lens of Jacques Lowe, October 31<sup>st</sup> -December 21<sup>st</sup>
  - Photographing History, A talk with Photographer Cecil Williams, November 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>
  - Political Parties and the Culture of Conventions, January 27<sup>th</sup> – December 15<sup>th</sup>
- River Center –
  - Baton Rouge Zydeco Hockey games all through November & December

- The Book of Mormon, November 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>
- A Charlie Brown Christmas, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7:00 p.m.
- John Crist comedian, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m.
- LASM – Annual Museum Store Holiday Shopping Event, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
- USS Kidd – Open Daily 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – First Saturdays of the month
- Red Stick Farmer’s Market – Every Saturday 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

**9. Commission Announcements & Updates:**

- None

**10. Public Comment:**

- Shaun Breaux, a French language teacher, announced they are coordinating a Bastille Day event, a French national holiday, in Downtown Baton Rouge next year. They also will have an event at the Old State Capitol in July 2024.
- Luke Lognion, BRASS, mentioned Work Downtown, Play Downtown. Daily discounts are given to downtown workers by participating bars and restaurants on Monday – Friday from 4:00 PM – 7:00 PM. Visit [www.workplaybr.com](http://www.workplaybr.com) for participating businesses and discounts and don’t forget to shop local.
- Pam Bordelon and Jonathon Grimes with the Arts Council updated the Commission on the Festival of Lights. Mr. Grimes stated the Festival of Lights will be held on December 1 from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The community performances and John Graves Soul Jukeboxx All-Star Band will be performing on the main stage at the Crest on North Boulevard. Andy Adler, President of Bank Plus, mentioned they are the sponsor of Red Stick Revelry (New Year’s Eve). The Arts Council will be hosting Red Stick Rising will be held from 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. for kids, free and open to the public. Later in the evening from 8:00 p.m. – 12:00 p.m., two musical performances with DJ Marquis and the Molly Ringwolds will close the show. Mr. Adler stated this is Bank Plus’s third time sponsoring the event and he has been downtown now for 24 years and has seen downtown come full circle. Ms. Bordelon mentioned tomorrow night at the Manship Theatre is the second of the River City Jazz Master’s concerts celebrating 100 years of Disney Music, “When You Wish Upon a Star” at 7:30 p.m.
- Nita Mitchell with LASM announced a program, “Who Works the River” on January 30 & 31, 2024. Who Works the Rivers events to create an opportunity to engage with careers along the river and appreciate our nation’s waterways. LASM's 4th Annual "A Very Merry Museum" will be Saturday, December 2, from 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, December 3 is the Free First Sunday in partnership with 100 Black Men.
- Tom Mackey with Cortana Kiwanis announced the Christmas Parade on December 9 @ 5:30 pm

Whitney Hoffman Sayal acknowledged Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman and BRPD and thanked them for attending the meeting.

**11. Meeting Adjourned** –Gary Jupiter moved to adjourn the meeting, Joshua Hollins seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned.