

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

October 11, 2022, 8:00 a.m.

Old State Capitol, 100 North Boulevard

Board Members in Attendance: Ms. Melanie Montanaro-Chairwoman, Mr. Eric Dexter-Vice Chairman, Mr. Patrick Michaels, Ms. Erin Monroe-Wesley, and Mr. Scott Hensgens

Absent: Mr. Prescott Bailey-Secretary, Mr. Jude Melville-Treasurer

Others in Attendance: Lauralyn Maranto, Jill Kidder, Luke Lognion, Brandon Songy, Cheri Soileau, Bruce Woods, Mary Durusau David Kors, Sarah Nicols, Parks Stephenson, Suzette Crocker, Colleen Rials, Joey Furr, Pam Bordelon, Serena Pandos, Tom Tanner, Kevin Broussard, Jamie Tanner, Landon Hester, Melanie Couvillon, Sandra Mott, Joseph Butler, Brando Weber, T.C. Lam, Brian Goad, Houston Tullis, Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Ute Cress

1. Melanie Montanaro called the meeting to order and declared a quorum. Ms. Montanaro welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting and thanked Mary Durusau and her staff for hosting the meeting at the Old State Capitol.

Mary Durusau welcomed everyone to the Old State Capitol and gave a brief history of the Capitol and the House Chamber, where the meeting was being held.

2. Melanie Montanaro made a motion to amend the Agenda to remove the I-10 Expansion Update and add the Old Louisiana Governor's Mansion. Eric Dexter seconded the motion, and the motion was approved.

3. Eric Dexter made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 13th meeting, Scott Hensgens seconded the motion, and the motion was approved.

4. Update from previous Board meeting: Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the status of the River Center Improvements and the Louisiana Avenue Connection. \$2.3 million in renovations and improvements for the River Center facility have been proposed to the Metro Council. Proposed improvements include upgrades in security, additional theater seating, basketball flooring and goals, and hockey features including an LED scoreboard and a Zamboni.

The Louisiana Avenue Connection went out for bids last month and Industrial Enterprises was the low bidder and was awarded the contract. This project will connect the Government Street bike lanes to the Downtown Greenway at East Boulevard/TJ Jemison.

5. Board Action: None

6. Governmental Issues: Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission.

- **HPC Demolition Approval, 224 Florida:** The Historic Preservation Committee last month approved the demolition of 224 Florida Street. The area is an addition to the State National Life building and plans are to utilize the space for residential units in the downtown area.
- **Short-Term Rental Ordinance:** Details of the ordinance were presented by the Planning Commission staff at last month's meeting. The item will be on the October 19th Metro Council Zoning Agenda for public hearing. If you have specific questions regarding the ordinance you can contact the Planning Commission or our office and the ordinance can also be viewed on the Planning Commission's website.

7. Development Initiatives:

A. Electric Vehicle Chargers – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission stating the Mayor's office has created a strategic plan to promote the use of electric vehicles to add 20 charging stations in a downtown parking lot, this is in addition to the 10 that we have located throughout the Central Business District.

B. Visit Baton Rouge President/CEO Update – Jill Kidder, President/CEO of Visit Baton Rouge (VBR) greeted the Commission and gave a brief background of her career. She has spent the past 15 years with the Louisiana Travel Association, spending the first 10 years as co-executive director. Ms. Kidder wants to work with other economic development agencies to help promote Baton Rouge as a place for young people to visit and live in the downtown and other areas of the city.

A strategic plan has been completed for Visit Baton Rouge and approved by the VBR Board. VBR's vision is for Baton Rouge to be known nationally and internationally to be a travel destination providing an exceptional, authentic experience and making memories for each guest. Residents will recognize the value and contributions of the visitor economy and will fully enjoy the same experiences. The goal of VBR is to improve the economy by increasing visitation and visitor spending because tourism is economic development. Tourism will increase revenues, residents pay fewer taxes, promote more jobs, and improve the quality of life. Ms. Kidder stated that VBR is committed to Downtown, supporting the convention center study, exploring clean and safe initiatives, sponsoring events, improving gateways and entry points, advocating mobility options, marketing downtown to residents and visitors, and being DDD's best partner. She is very excited to be working with the DDD Executive Director, Whitney Hoffman Sayal, and the other organizations in the downtown area to achieve this.

C. Viking Cruises – Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated that the Viking Cruise ship docked for the first time in Baton Rouge last Friday. There will be 200 boat dockings next year including the Viking cruises and 50 more boat dockings for the remainder of this year. Each docking is different regarding the length of stay from a few hours to overnight.

- D. LASM Update** – Serena Pandos, LASM Director, announced the LASM’S 60th Anniversary, 2022 Gala: Diamonds of History raised has raised \$299,610 and anticipates reaching the goal of \$300,000. All funds raised by the Gala will support the renovation of LASM’s hands-on children’s galleries into The Seed, an innovative space where young artists and scientists will grow through the hands-on exploration of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics). Other upgrades at LASM include lighting the Planetarium Dome, soft washing the exterior of the building, enhancing the river view by installing windows overlooking the river, updating the Train Station building, and upgrading the landscaping around the building.
- E. Old Governor’s Mansion Update:** Sandra Mott, with the Louisiana Museum System, updated the Commission on Old Governor’s Mansion and stated it is now under the care of the Department of the Secretary of State. Renovations of the Old Governor’s Mansion were recently completed that include the restoration of the hand-painted wallpaper by artist Elise Grenier. The wallpaper was designed by French artist Jean-Julien Deltil, one of only three sets in the United States. The cost of construction was almost \$150,000 with an added \$22,000 for the finest damask and velvet drapes, crystal chandeliers, and other high-end pieces. The Old Governor’s Mansion is open Monday-Friday from 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM and is available for weddings, lectures, and meetings.
- F. CATS Update** – Ms. Cheri Soileau, CATS Director of Planning, and Brandon Songy, Service Planning Scheduler updated the Commission. Ms. Soileau stated the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is moving forward to create a 9-mile bus line from Plank Road to Nicholson Drive and terminating at the LSU Campus; they are working with LSU to determine where a good turn area might be. This is a high-quality and cost-effective transit system that delivers fast, reliable, and efficient service with unique branding, enhanced stations, and more frequent service with quick turnarounds and 15-minute headways during the AM and PM peak hours. Service will run from 5:00 AM to 11:00 PM Monday-Friday and weekends, 30 minutes throughout the day from 6:00 AM – 10:00 PM. The North Transit Center will begin construction from January 2023 through December 2023 and other stations beginning mid-Spring 2023 through Spring 2024. Fleet delivery is expected in mid-2024.

Brandon Songy announced Touchdown TRAX is operating for all LSU home games. The cost of the tickets is \$10.00 for one (1) game. The Touchdown TRAX downtown pick-up locations are Lafayette Street at Convention Street (Hotel Indigo) and Florida Street at I - 110 (under the interstate). Touchdown TRAX begins taking fans to campus three hours prior to kick-off. Touchdown TRAX passengers will be dropped off on campus near the LSU softball fields. After the game, fans can return to the drop-off location to reload the bus and return to their place of origin, with return trips running until one hour after the game ends.

- G. USS Kidd Director & Update:** Rosehn Gipes, USS Kidd Director announced she was stepping down after three years and introduced Parks Stephenson as the new Executive

Director. Ms. Gipes stated that they are planning to prepare the 80-year-old ship to be dry-docked for much-needed repairs in the next 2-3 years. Advertising for the architecture and engineering plans to take the ship to dry dock will be released in mid-December. Fundraising events are being planned for this project.

Mr. Stephenson stated he is a 20-year Navy veteran after graduating from the Navy Academy. He first became interested in the USS Kidd when studying the ship as he prepared to take part in deep-sea dives to explore the USS Johnston, the Kidd's sunken sister. Mr. Stephenson says he jumped at the chance to work with the USS Kidd to keep it afloat, continue the restoration to its WWII appearance and bring it into the 21st century with new technology.

- H. Charles Lamar YMCA Building Renovations** – Kevin Broussard, YMCA Executive Director of Facilities, updated the Commission. The Charles Lamar YMCA has been open for more than 20 years and is a staple of downtown. Beginning this summer, the YMCA began a half-million-dollar renovation to the facility which included upgrading the showers, changing out the flooring, and all the cardio pieces. The YMCA now includes EGYM smart equipment that allows users to electronically set preferences through an app.
- I. Belle Casino of Baton Rouge Update** – Bruce Woods, General Manager, showed the Commission slides, via PowerPoint, renderings of the proposed renovations for the Belle Casino. The Belle recently received approval from the Louisiana Gaming Control Board to move the casino landside. The first phase of the \$35 million renovations will begin with the hotel renovating and reopening 90 of the 288 rooms. The Belle will move the 16,500 square foot gambling floor into the casino atrium, there will be 316 slot machines and 14 gaming tables, and a sports book. The Belle will also open a café, oyster bar, bistro pizza, a small bowling area with two lanes, and an event area in the atrium. The entire project is expected to be completed by the end of 2024, but the hotel will be open much earlier. About 200 jobs will be created by the reopening of the casino, hotel, and additional restaurants, which also would increase foot traffic in the area.
- J. 232 Lafayette Street Building Acquisition** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the purchase of 232 Lafayette Street. The DDD has been working very closely with the developer and he intends to pursue 20-plus condominiums, which have been requested or asked about for the downtown area. Renovations will be an improvement as the building has been vacant for a while and is in a very visible location directly across from the Hilton Hotel

8. Events - Mr. Casey Tate updated the Commission on the following downtown events:

- Live After Five – Fridays, September 16 – October 28
- Sunday in the Park – Curley Taylor & Zydeco Trouble, October 16
- Jambalaya Jam – North Boulevard Town Square, October 13
- Louisiana Book Festival – Capitol Park & State Library, October 29

- 2022 Fifelet Halloween Parade – Fifelet’s Believe It or Not! October 29
- Manship Theatre – Nikki Lane, Denim & Diamonds Tour, October 19, 7:30 PM
- LSU MOA – Artist Meet & Greet - Alex Podesta, Friday, October 14, 6:00 PM
- Capital Park Museum – Spanish Town Walking Tour, October 15
- Old State Capitol – Who Gets to Vote? Voices and Votes on display
- Old State Capitol – Spirits of Louisiana, Thursday, October 27
- River Center – October Events: Swan Lake, Aaron Lewis, Cody Jinks, 38 Special
- LASM – Halloween Day at the Museum, Saturday, October 29, 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM
- USS Kidd – Fur, Feathers, and Fidelity: Military Mascots now on display
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – First Saturday of the month, November 5
- Red Stick Farmer’s Market – Every Saturday, 5th and Main Streets
- CPEX Smart Growth Summit – Manship Theatre, December 7 & 8

9. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced, beginning yesterday, the parking meter kiosks have started being installed. The contractor has 30 days to install them, but they will not be immediately operational until all the coordination with the signage and the app has been completed. DDD will keep everyone informed when they become operational.
- Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated the DDD’s Development Project Director job opening requisition will be closing on October 13. In addition, the DDD has hired a student intern, Houston Tullis.

10. Public Comment:

- Luke Lognion, BRASS by Circa 1857, announced they are working with the Downtown Business Association and the DDD to begin a campaign called “work downtown, play downtown”. The program is to entice downtown workers to stay downtown after 5:00 PM by offering a special happy hour menu at participating bars, restaurants, and hotels along with a coupon to use the next day. Additional information and details will be announced at the next DDD meeting.
- Pam Bordelon with the Arts Council announced the 2023 MPAC Gala celebrating their 50th Anniversary on January 12, from 7:00 PM-10:00 PM at the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center. Tickets can be purchased on the Arts Council website.

11. Meeting Adjourned – Scott Hensgens moved to adjourn the meeting, Erin Monroe Wesley seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned.