

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

September 12 2023, 8:00 AM

Taylor, Porter, Brooks & Phillips Law Office – 450 Laurel Street, 9th Floor

Board Members in Attendance: Mr. Eric Dexter-Chairman, Mr. Prescott Bailey-Treasurer, Mr. Patrick Michaels-Secretary, Mr. Gary Jupiter, Mr. Scott Hensgens, Ms. Melanie Montanaro

Absent: Mr. Jude Melville-Vice Chairman

Others in Attendance: Chris Chandler, Parks Stephenson, Mary Jane Marcantel, Elijah Cannon, Rannah Gray, Miranda Baralone, Zhanea Lee, Jake Polansky, Judy Foust, Chris Glisson, Caroline Cassagne, Phillip LaFargue, Justin Lemoine, Gary Black, Malorey Uzee Cutrer, John Snow, Perry Franklin, John O. Hearin, Amelia Gabore, Kendra Hendricks, Darlene Rowland, Madelyn Bray Neilsen, Paige Gagliano, Amelia Gabor, Michael Lang, Charles Daniel, Collin Lindrew, Daniel McGlynn, Anna Gasperecz, Sarah Noles, Representative Barbara Freiberg, Mukul Verma, Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Morgan Lewis, Casey Tate, Ute Cress

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone and thanked Charles McKenzie, Director of Administration for the law offices of Taylor, Porter, Brooks & Phillips. Mr. McKenzie stated that Taylor-Porter law offices have been downtown for over 110 years. The offices were renovated about 5 years ago and Mr. McKenzie invited everyone after the meeting to view the terrace overlooking the river.

1. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Melanie Montanaro made a motion to approve the agenda, Scott Hensgens seconded, and the motion was approved.
3. Scott Hensgens made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 8, 2023 meeting, Gary Jupiter seconded, and the motion was approved.
4. **Board Action:**
 - **2024 Strategic Plan** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the status of the 2024 Strategic Plan. The DDD has been working with Philip LaFargue Consultants on the Strategic Plan for the past few months. To help with the endeavor, a survey was conducted around April/May with approximately 1400 responses. Additionally, group and individual discussions and workshops were held with stakeholders of downtown and DDD Commissioners. The plan is now finalized with four pillars:
 - 1. Organizational Sustainability and Responsible Governance
 - A. Increase Finance Stability
 - B. Modernize Governance

- C. Clarify Roles between DD and Downtown Business Association
- 2. Building up the Core: Planning, Projects, and Infrastructure
 - A. Capitalize on Downtown Assets
 - B. Cultivate Relationships and Connections
 - C. Respond to Housing Demand
 - D. Enhance Downtown Transportation Options
- 3. Improving the Downtown Experience for All Members of Our Community
 - A. Establish a Clean and Safe Program
 - B. Engage Partners in Safety Efforts
 - C. Improve Lighting
- 4. Enhancing Communications for Transparency, Brand Building, & Progress
 - A. Facilitate District Neighborhood Connections
 - B. Improve Downtown Marketing

The Commission members viewed, via PowerPoint, slides of the timeline showing and where implementation is to take place over the next five years, which is subject to change. The Strategic Plan will be posted later today to the DDD website at www.downtownbatonrouge.org

Eric Dexter asked Mr. LaFargue if he could explain the difference between a strategic plan and a master plan. Mr. LaFargue stated a master plan is the method of developing or improving your community through a long-range plan and strategic planning is organizational management of the office.

Gary Jupiter made a motion to approve the 2024 DDD Strategic Plan, Scott Hensgens seconded the motion, and the motion was approved.

5. Governmental Issues:

- **DDD Supplemental Budget Approval** – Casey Tate briefed the Commission on a budget supplement request of \$200,000 for quality-of-life improvements dedicated to three projects:
 1. Wayfinding Signage Renovation – Working with a contractor to refurbish the award-winning signage structures and updating all the labeling and verbiage.
 2. Urban Tree Canopy Re-Establishment – Over the years downtown has lost some of the tree canopy due to hurricanes, disease, etc. DDD will be working with other organizations such as Baton Rouge Green and the City-Parish Maintenance Department and others to fill in the gaps for the street trees.
 3. Third Street Streetscape Improvements – DDD will be looking at some designs for increased parklets, such as seating, lighting, and other amenities for the public to increase beautification.
- **BR Road Rehab** – The Commission viewed a slide, via PowerPoint, on the BR Road Rehab projects. Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated that Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome announced major roadway enhancements. DDD drew a map outlining some of the road improvement areas for downtown, the red lines are the DDD boundary and the green lines indicate the road improvements.

6. Development Initiatives:

- **Downtown Baltimore Visit** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on a visit from Shelonda Stokes, President of the Baltimore Downtown Partnership, and her staff. They are members of the International Downtown Association, of which the DDD is a member, and have attended conferences with them. They are in town to visit the Real Time Crime Center today and DDD will be hosting them this afternoon to discuss what both agencies are doing for the downtowns.
- **617 North Boulevard** – Michael Lang, Key Real Estate, updated the Commission on the status of the property at 617 North Boulevard. Mr. Lang stated it's been about 3-4 months since they purchased the property and attended the DDD. The last time they attended the DDD meeting there was some information from a survey DDD conducted which stated how much additional residential is needed downtown and now the strategic plan timeline shows a residential component in the second quarter of 2025 initiative, so the timing is right. Mr. Lang stated he was happy to see their timeline overlapping with the strategic plan. Projects of this scale take quite a long time to come together in terms of planning and 18-24 months of construction. The apartments will be high-quality, rental luxury residences. Mr. Lang stated they have received approval to proceed with the demolition of the existing building. Arkel Construction is the demolition contractor and work is expected to begin in the next thirty days, which is a 6-8-week process. Heron One, the sister building, has 142 units, the new project will have approximately 200-230 units. The development is currently in the design phase with Humphreys and Partners Architects out of Dallas. They plan on designing something a little different from Heron One, however, stay in the same design concept. The proposed project will have one story of parking and 5 stories above. A rooftop sky lounge overlooking North Boulevard is proposed on the southwest corner of the building. Other amenities include an athletic facility, individual workspaces/breakout rooms, a pet area, and a swimming pool on the rooftop.
- **The Queen Casino** – The Commission viewed images, via PowerPoint, of the finished construction for the city's first land-based casino. Whitney Hoffman Sayal, updated the Commission on the Queen Casino's grand opening held on August 24th. Mrs. Hoffman Sayal attended the grand opening and stated the developers invested over \$85 million into renovations of the space, which includes more than 100,000 square feet of gaming, 4 dining destinations, a dedicated smoking patio, a new parking lot, and entertainment areas. The DDD is looking to hold a future Commission meeting in the event space overlooking the river.
- **Emergent Method Expansion** – John Snow, Partner at Emergent Method, briefed the Commission on their office expansion to incorporate the first floor of the building on the corner of Laurel and Lafayette. Mr. Snow stated Emergent Method is a management consulting firm that started downtown in 2012 with two people. Over the years they continued growing rapidly from 100 workers in early 2020 to just under 200 in 2023. Carbo Landscape recently moved out of the building and Emergent Method was able to move into their space adding 2300 square feet to their footprint. They finally have a front desk, some additional conference

space, smaller work areas, standing desks, and smaller spaces for those who work remotely but need space when they come into the office. Mr. Snow stated they have been downtown since they first began in 2012 and are excited to be here 10 plus years later, to build on their presence, and look forward to many more years to come. They do work all across the country, but Emergent Method's headquarters has always been in Downtown Baton Rouge and always will be. They look forward to building on their presence for many more years.

- **Hotel Indigo Renovation** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, renderings of renovations to the Hotel Indigo. Miranda Barcelona, Director of Operations at Hotel Indigo briefed the Commission on the renovations to the hotel which began on October 1, 2023, and plans to complete the project in July 2024. Baton Rouge's history with striking architecture and culinary heritage will be brought to life in the renovations of the hotel. The theme of the hotel is Red Stick Industrial and Southern hospitality, the building was originally the Standard and Motor Oil Company. The King Bar & Bistro is upgrading to a more upscale area with comfortable seating and a new food and beverage menu. A model room has been completed and can be viewed on Monday-Thursday from 9:00 – 5:00, no appointment is needed. They are currently working with Lucas Lognion of BRASS to obtain local artwork.
- **Manship Theatre Renovations** – Melanie Couvillion, Executive Director, and Paige Gagliano, Director of Development updated the Commission on the Manship Theatre renovation. Ms. Couvillion stated the Manship Theatre had been closed for about 6 weeks and they just finished installing new chairs and carpeting designed by a local graphic designer, Bryn Castille. They will officially reopen on September 28th with a concert by Tab Benoit. Ms. Gagliano stated the Manship Theatre is having a "Sponsor a Seat Campaign". A personalized engraved brass plaque will be attached to the seat of your choice (subject to availability) for a tax-deductible donation of \$1,000. Each personalized nameplate has space for 2 lines with a maximum of 30 characters.
- **Legacy Lobby** – Chris Glisson and Danny McGlynn briefed the Commission on a new event venue, the Legacy Lobby at McGlynn, Glisson, & Mouton (MGM) Law Offices, 340 Florida Street. The building was originally built in the early 1900s for Capital City Press/The Advocate newspaper. MGM Law Office purchased and renovated the building in 2000. Over the years, they have had several restaurants occupy the bottom floor and now will open the area as an event space for weddings, corporate events, etc. They are having an event/open house on Thursday, October 5th at 4:00 to introduce Downtown's newest event space—The Legacy Lobby. In addition, Poindexter's BBQ will be having a pop-up shop in September on Wednesdays and Fridays in the lobby beginning September 13th at 11:00 until they run out.
- **Assembly Required** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on an Assembly Required downtown bike tour, "A Hidden Gem Bike Tour" on September 21st. Charles Daniel with Geaux Ride is helping to organize the tour and use their bikes. Mr. Daniel stated the bike ride would be about an hour long and highlight some of the attractions, museums, and artwork downtown.
- **Florida Corridor Plan Public Meeting** – Gretchen Siemers, Vice President, Build Baton Rouge, and Perry Franklin, Franklin Associates, Strategic Consultant, updated the Commissioners. Ms. Siemers stated Build Baton Rouge is working on a master plan for the Florida Corridor between

the river and the parish line. In 2021 Build Baton Rouge created an economic development district, which allows for tax increment finance to be collected within a 2-mile area around the Amazon facility. Priorities coming out of the TIF include streetscape intervention, lighting, sidewalks, etc., and will be working on this for the next year. Mr. Franklin stated the Florida Corridor is a 12-mile stretch of road spanning from the Mississippi River to the Amite River. Because of its length, it borders about 20 diverse neighborhoods. The goal of the plan is to unite them all. The community meetings will be held on Tuesday, September 19 from 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. at Broadmoor United Methodist, Wednesday, September 20 from 11:00 a.m.– 1:30 p.m. at the River Center Branch Library, and Thursday, September 21 from 5:30 p.m.–7:30 p.m. at the BREC Ball Room. Additional information can be found at www.floridacorridorbr.com

- **CATS Public Meeting** – Brandon Songy, CATS, updated the Commissioners on micro-transit in the Parish and the city of Baker. It was launched in June 2022 and exceeded their expectations with 65,000 rides to date. This is a low-cost effective on-demand transit service, they operate 5 minivans, all wheelchair accessible. CATS is doing some research to see if downtown can support this along with the downtown circulator. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is to begin in the first quarter of 2025. This will be the first BRT line in the state of Louisiana operated by new all-electric 35' buses. CATS has a contactless fare app called UMO, a single ride/one-way fare is \$1.75, they do have a fare cap of \$4.00 per day. A new reliable bus tracking app is on the way; you'll be able to receive real-time notifications via SMS, email, and other notifications, hopefully before the end of the year. CATS has received six new 30-foot battery electric buses, which they hope to be online by the end of the year. CATS is looking for input from the community for the Empower Baton Rouge Transit Study. Empower Baton Rouge is offering opportunities for community members to share information about their transportation experience in September so they can recognize existing barriers and needs. The Community will have the chance to participate through listening sessions, surveys, and other events on the following dates:
 - 5-7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 7 (Virtual)
 - 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 12 (Baker Municipal Center Auditorium)
 - 5-7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 12 (Dr. Leo S. Butler Community Center)
 - noon to 2 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 14 (EBRPL Fairwood Branch Library)
 - 6-8 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 14 (BREC Ben Burge Park)

7. Events -

Casey Tate updated the Commission on the following events:

- Live After Five – Chris Leblanc Band, Friday, September 15th
- Food Truck Fridays – Coming Soon, Corner of Third and Main Street
- Geaux Ride Free Sundays – Sundays of Hope Every Sunday, Glow Ride – Every Thursday
- Park(ing) Day – Friday, September 15th
- Ryan's Run – Sickle Cell 5K, Saturday, September 16th, 8:00 a.m., Galvez Plaza
- St. Jude 5K – Saturday, September 30th, AZ Young Park
- Sunday in the Park – Shaw Center, Sundays in October

- Louisiana Arts Summit – Wednesday, October 4th – Friday, October 6th
- Taste of the Deep South – Saturday, October 7th – Sunday, October 8th, Riverfront Plaza
- Jambalaya Jam – October 12th, 5:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. North Boulevard Town Square
- Manship Theatre – Sponsor-A-Seat Campaign
 - Tab Benoit – Thursday, September 28th, 7:30 p.m.
 - Will Kimbrough – Friday, October 6th, 7:30 p.m.
- LSU MOA – Dr. Lauren Cross Tuesday, August 29, 6:00 p.m.
 - Annual Meeting, Tuesday, September 12, 6:00 p.m.
- Capital Park Museum – Discovery Day: The Battle of Baton Rouge, Saturday, Sept. 16, 9:00-12:00
- Old State Capitol –
 - Reconstruction in Louisiana, Tuesday, September 19, 2023, 6:00 PM
 - Two Minutes to Midnight, September 1 – October 21, 2023
 - Political Parties and the Culture of Conventions, until December 15
- River Center –
 - Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse Live in Concert, September 17th at 7:00 PM
 - Katt Williams, The Dark Matter Tour – September 29th @ 8:00 PM
- LASM –
 - James Hood’s Beautifica, September 9th and September 16th
 - LASM’S 38th Annual Gala, October 6, 2023
 - Planetarium Don Lighting and the Grand Opening and “The Seed” coming in October
- USS. Kidd – Open Daily 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM
- Red Stick Farmer’s Market –Every Saturday 8:00-12:00 on the Corner of 5th and Main Streets
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – Every First Saturday of the Month, October 6th
- 5th Annual Farm Fete – Thursday, September 28th

Eric Dexter noted there are a couple of Commissioners who have served their terms representing their respective neighborhoods and businesses downtown, Melanie Montanaro and Scott Hensgens. Mr. Dexter stated that as the current board chair, he’s had the opportunity to serve with Scott and Melanie as previous chairs. The past 3 years going through the pandemic, losing Davis Rhorer, hiring a new Executive Director, which has never been done, and then producing a 5-year strategic plan has been tough as a volunteer, from a volunteer perspective. Mr. Dexter thanked Melanie and Scott on behalf of the Commission and the DDD for their service. Whitney Hoffman Sayal presented them with a plaque and thanked them for their service.

8. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- None

9. Public Comment:

- Darlene Rowland with BREADA mentioned the Farm Fete Annual Fundraiser beginning at the Main Street Market on Saturday, September 23 with a week-long celebration. They will have music, wine pull, and silent auction items out for viewing at the market the auction opens that morning, and Cocha will be selling Bloody Mary’s and Mimosa’s. The ticketed Farm Fete

Fundraiser will be held on September 28 at the River Center Branch Library Terrace. It will be a fabulous evening of local food, and drink. Sample farm fresh food from 10 local restaurants, sip on curated cocktails, wine, and beer while dancing to tunes from John Gray Jazz and Friends! Proceeds benefit local nonprofit BREADA and its work to connect farmers and families and expand access to fresh, local food. The silent auction will be open to virtual bidders as well as event attendees.

- Charles Daniel with Geaux Ride stated they are celebrating 7 years downtown and plan on being long-term downtown. Mr. Daniel announced they have sponsored with Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome's Summer of Hope initiative. Every Sunday in September, between 7:30 PM – 9:30 PM, we offer free 30-minute rentals to everyone who registers online at www.geauxride.org. This free bike rental will give you a health and wellness break everyone deserves to jump-start their week right in beautiful downtown Baton Rouge. In addition, Geaux Ride is having children's bike riding lessons on Saturday mornings and parent and me painting classes with 4 different sessions, sign up at www.geauxride.org. On Thursdays, they will be having wellness rides, riding from downtown to Mid-City near the Electric Depot. Mr. Daniel announced they have partnered with Steven Hightower with DIG Baton Rouge to bring a series of 10-15 food trucks to downtown, near North and Main Streets to create some health and wellness and bring some foot traffic to Third Street.
- Parks Stevenson, Executive Director of the USS Kidd announced the ship will hopefully go into dry dock for overhaul next year, based on the water height of the river, for approximately one year. The river wasn't high enough this year to move the ship from its cradle. They will begin to strip down the ship on November 1, taking off removable items. The ship will have the hull repaired and the entire ship will be completely re-painted in the dazzle camouflage she wore in 1944. They are hoping to leave next spring and return when the river rises the following spring, however, that could extend up to two years based on the water levels. The museum will remain open and they are working with Celtic Studios to put in a 4D-VR experience for visitors to experience a Kamikaze attack on the USS Kidd. A slate of new exhibits will be placed in the museum to tell a story of what it was like to serve on a ship in wartime.
- Amelia Gabore with CPEX briefed the Commission on Park(ing) Day an annual, global event where artists, activists, and ordinary citizens transform parking spaces into temporary public parks—small park spaces that fit into the space of a parking spot—or parklets. Park(ing) Day will be held this Friday, September 15 from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Curbside parking spaces along N 5th at Main and North Boulevard will be converted into miniature parks and social spaces.

Eric Dexter recognized Representative Barbara Freiberg and thanked her for attending the meeting.

10. Meeting Adjourned – Scott Hensgens moved to adjourn the meeting, Melanie Montanaro seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned.