

## **DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES**

December 14, 2021 8:00 a.m.

The LABI Office, 500 Main Street

**Board Members in Attendance:** Mr. Eric Dexter-Vice Chairman, Mr. Patrick Michaels, Mr. Scott Hensgens

**Absent:** Ms. Melanie Montanaro-Chairwoman, Mr. Prescott Bailey-Secretary, Mr. Jude Melville-Treasurer, Ms. Erin Monroe-Wesley

**Others in Attendance:** John Kelton, Rannah Gray, Neal Noel, John Spain, Mary Jane Marcantel, Rosehn Gipe, Clay Young, Chuck Cornett, Melanie Couvillon, Sgt. Brandon Blust, Justin Lemoine, Landon Hester, David Rhymes, Julia Claire Evans, Tim Boone, Johnny Palazzotto, Fredrick Sargent, Carolyn Coleman, Gary Jupiter, Mysti Byrnes, Caroline Byrne, Christopher Spalatin, Steve Moberry, Herb Piert, Gabe Vicknair, Casey Tate, Ute Cress

1. Mr. Eric Dexter called the meeting to order. Mr. Dexter explained there was not a quorum present, therefore, no approvals were being made on voting items. The November minutes will be deferred to the January meeting to be approved.

2. **Board Action:** None

3. **Governmental Issues:** None

4. **Update from previous Board meeting – Executive Director Search –** Mr. Eric Dexter stated the contract for Emergent Method was finalized last Friday. The Commission will form a search committee made up of DDD Commission members, create a job description in line with the needs and expectations of the role and within the goals and visions of the Downtown Development District. A press release, job posting, and messaging will be released to promote the job once it is posted. Lastly, develop a recruitment strategy where advertising the position is effective as possible reaching out to local, regional, and national candidates.

8. **Development Initiatives:**

**A. Developments Underway: 2021 Recap –** Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission on the past year’s growth in the downtown area, even during the pandemic.

- Carey Saurage Center for the Arts opened its new building which houses the Arts Council and the Baton Rouge Symphony along with some local artists. The renovations included accessibility (ADA) improvements, sidewalk, striping and parking improvements, landscaping, and tree trimming for building visibility.

- Rhorer Plaza was dedicated in honor of Davis Rhorer, celebrating the life and legacy of Mr. Rhorer and his 34 years of dedication to the revival of Downtown Baton Rouge. Mr. Vicknair stated this green space was one of Mr. Rhorer's favorite parks, one of the final components of the Central Green spaces linking downtown's attractions and lawns for recreation and where so many events take place such as Live After Five.
- The restoration of the Martin Luther King, Jr. sculpture was completed in March after many years of fundraising efforts. Baton Rouge Area Foundation, the Mayor's office, the Arts Council of Greater Baton Rouge, and many civic and business leaders teamed up for the fundraising.
- The River Center Branch Library opens; the new downtown library is the centerpiece of North Boulevard Town Square and the Central Green - a place where our city's civic and cultural attractions come together.
- Downtown saw an increase in new residential construction. Downtown East has three new housing developments, Elysian III, Valencia Park, and Lotus Village for a total of 468 units. Old South Baton Rouge and the Water Campus housing have a total of 268 new units.
- Outdoor programming and other events picked up again, with Live After Five, festivals, yoga, running, and other activities. Bars and restaurants have seen an increase in nightlife returning to downtown.

**B. Rural Sourcing** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on the status of a new software development company, Rural Sourcing, which will bring in 150 new jobs downtown. They are scouting locations for office space now but eventually would like to renovate a historic building.

**C. NOLA/BR Passenger Rail** – Mr. John Spain, BRAF Vice President, briefed the Commission on a passenger rail line connecting Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Canadian Pacific Railway recently committed to a Baton Rouge-to-New Orleans passenger rail service, something BRAF has been working on for over a decade. A partnership between passenger railroad service trains, Amtrak, is in place with Canadian Pacific Railway. Studies say that \$262 million in upgrades would bring the tracks up to standards for an inter-city rail; an infrastructure bill is available between 66 and 100 billion dollars for inter-city rail. Recommended train stops are downtown and the Health District in Baton Rouge, Gonzales, LaPlace, Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, and the Union Passenger Terminal next to the Superdome in New Orleans.

**D. Hospitality & Tourism Update** – Mr. Casey Tate updated the Commission on the travel and tourism industry for downtown Baton Rouge. Ms. Tate showed the Commission, via PowerPoint, a bar chart displaying the hotel occupancy and rates. The YTD occupancy rate numbers as of November, for 2021 will exceed the 2019 occupancy rate. The average daily rate is still down, but that is looking to increase as well. The downtown area hotels have

seen an increase in occupancy for conventions, weddings, vacations, and Christmas parties and expect this trend to continue.

- E. Downtown Security Cameras** –Mr. Clay Young, Chair of the Baton Rouge Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Foundation, updated the Commission on the installation of downtown security cameras. The camera infrastructure downtown dates back to 2005, is antiquated, and does not have a real-time crime center. The agency and downtown stakeholders raised \$100,000 to replace the old cameras and another \$50,000 to add additional cameras including Convention Street, St. Louis Street, and the areas around the Capitol Grounds and the Raising Cane’s River Center. 19 antiquated and damaged cameras are being replaced and 10 new additional cameras are being installed. All the high-definition cameras will feed back to the Crime Center where they can view the footage in real-time. This will improve safety on the street from large crimes to small crimes such as vandalism, which will be very helpful in solving the crimes.

Next week a news conference will be held to announce that the updated and new cameras will be connected to the BRPD Real-Time Crime Center.

- F. Red Stick Revelry** Ms. Rannah Gray informed the Commission Red Stick Revelry will return downtown this New Year’s Eve, after going virtual in 2020. This is a joint effort of various downtown city offices, organizations, and businesses. Ms. Gray stated this is an all-volunteer effort and she and Stacy Simon of Visit Baton Rouge are the volunteer coordinators. The event begins at 11:00 AM at the River Center Library & Town Square with a New Year’s Eve tradition for kids, which includes storytelling, art activities, and the Red Stick rising at noon. The evening event begins at 8:00 PM -12:00 AM at Davis Rhorer Plaza with music by Press 1 for English and the Michael Foster Project, and two new laser light shows and fireworks at midnight.

- G. Pedal Pub** - Mr. Herb Piert, COO of Pedal Pub, updated the Commission on the opening of Pedal Pub, a new business downtown. Mr. Piert explained the first pedal pub bikes began in the Netherlands in 2006. They have been headquartered in Minnesota for the past 15 years, there are over 55 franchise locations in the United States. The bike seats up to 16 passengers, not everyone has to pedal. They do not serve alcohol, you can bring your own, but is limited to wine and beer. They will abide by the rules and regulations regarding open container laws. Pedal Pub also conducts non-alcoholic tours. The primary purpose of the business is to offer exposure for visitors and locals that aren’t familiar with venues and attractions in the downtown area. There are currently 3 different tours in the downtown area.

- H. AARP Grant/Third Street Crosswalks** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission on the \$25,000 AARP Community Challenge Grant for crosswalk improvements. The low bid was awarded to Traffic Calming, USA. Decorative crosswalk patterns will be painted at Convention, Florida, Laurel, and Main Street, for a total of 16 crosswalks at 4 locations.

- I. New Businesses:**

- **Baton Rouge Area Souvenir Shop (BRASS)** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission on the opening of BRASS, a new gift and souvenir shop for tourists and residents located at 327 North Boulevard. In addition to the gift and souvenir shop, they will have a small coffee and build your own tea bar. They will be partnering with local artists who make Louisiana-based themed items for tourists and gifts for local residents.
- **Main Lobby** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair stated the Main Lobby Bar is close to opening and would like to get a representative to a DDD meeting in the near future.
- **Chelsea’s Live** – The first live show is scheduled for January 7; renovations are moving along and a sign should be up soon.

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

- Red Stick Revelry – December 31<sup>st</sup>, 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM
- Louisiana Marathon –January 15-16, 2022
- MPAC – Grand Opening Party, January 20, 2022
- Manship Theatre – Home for the Holidays, December 28<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 PM
- LSU/MOA – The Boneyard: The Ceramic Teaching Collection through February 13, 2022
- Capitol Park Museum – The Yellow Book: Old South Baton Rouge & Third Thursdays After Hours
- Old State Capitol – Manufacturing Victory Exhibit through December 17, 2021
- River Center Events – Ice Skating, December 17, 2021 – January 3, 2022
- LASM – Events throughout December
- USS Kidd – Wheels of War Traveling Exhibit – now open
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup>

**10. Ongoing Projects:**

- **DBA** – None
- **BREADA** – None

**11. Public Comment:** Sargent Brandon Blust, BRPD asked about the re-painting of the curbs and re-stripping the streets in the downtown area. Mr. Gabe Vicknair stated they would contact Traffic Engineer to check on the status of the painting and roadway striping.

**12. Meeting Adjourned** – Mr. Eric Dexter moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Scott Hensgens seconded and the meeting was adjourned.