

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

February 8, 2022 8:00 a.m.

First United Methodist, 930 North Boulevard

Board Members in Attendance: Ms. Melanie Montanaro-Chairwoman, Mr. Eric Dexter-Vice Chairman, Mr. Prescott Bailey-Secretary, Mr. Jude Melville-Treasurer, Ms. Erin Monroe-Wesley, Mr. Patrick Michaels, Mr. Scott Hensgens

Absent: None

Others in Attendance Karron Alford, Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman, Jacob Haynes, Brandon Songy, Cheri Soileau, Judy Faust, Mary Jane Marcantel, Brooke Goodrich, Mary Durrusau, John Snow, Allison Flynn, Landon Hester, Debra Kastner, Rafael Amaya, James Avault, John Kelton, Rosehn Gipe, Chris Nichols, Daniel Stetson, Mysti Byrnes, Terence Alexander, Brian Hood, Julia Evans, Melanie Couvillion, Andre Boudreaux, David Rhymes, Gabe Vicknair, Casey Tate, Ute Cress

1. Ms. Melanie Montanaro called the meeting to order and declared a quorum. Ms. Montanaro thanked First United Methodist for hosting the DDD meeting

Mr. Taylor Bacon, Director of Children’s Ministry, addressed the audience and welcomed the DDD and guests to First United Methodist. Mr. Bacon stated that coming out of the pandemic, First United wants to be a church where the downtown community can gather for events such as this meeting and is very excited to be hosting today’s meeting.

2. Ms. Erin Monroe Wesley made a motion to approve the agenda, Mr. Prescott Bailey seconded the motion, and the motion was approved.

3. Mr. Eric Dexter made a motion to approve the minutes from January 11, 202, Mr. Jude Melville seconded the motion, there was no opposition and the minutes were approved.

4. **Board Action:** None

5. **Governmental Issues:** None

6. **Update from previous Board meeting – Executive Director Search** - Ms. Melanie Montanaro updated the Commission on the Executive Director search by Emergent Method. The committee consists of the four members of the Executive DDD Commission, Ms. Melanie Montanaro-Chairwoman, Mr. Eric Dexter-Vice Chairman, Mr. Judd Melville-Treasurer, and Mr. Prescott Bailey-Secretary. In addition, District 10 Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman, former DDD Commission members and downtown stakeholders, Mr. Gordon Leblanc-Stonehenge Capital, and Mr. Rex

Cabaniss-WHLC Architecture. The search committee met for the first time last week to finalize the job description, Emergent Method opened and advertised the position on Thursday, February 3, for 45 days until March 20. The search committee will virtually interview the top five candidates, then narrow the list down to three. The top three will be interviewed in person by the committee, then the top candidate will be recommended to the Council for hiring.

7. Development Initiatives:

- A. Cats Downtown Circulator** – Ms. Cheri Soileau, CATS Director of Planning, updated the Commission. Ms. Soileau stated the CATS Downtown Circulator has two 35’ buses downtown on a trial basis running from 10:30 AM – 3:30 PM with 15-minute wait times, the ride is free. Two new 30’ buses are being prepared and they will replace the two 35’ buses when completed. The CATS Downtown Circulator is replacing the old trolley buses that serviced the downtown area, which were taken out of circulation during the pandemic. Ms. Soileau introduced Mr. Brandon Songy, Service Planning Scheduler, in charge of planning and scheduling all of the CATS buses. Ms. Soileau stated that CATS would like feedback from the public regarding the needs of the riders.
- B. Advantous Consulting** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair stated Mr. Jason DeCuir, co-owner was under the weather and would attend a meeting at a later date.
- C. Hospitality & Tourism Update** – Ms. Karron Alford, Director of Marketing and Technology with Visit Baton Rouge, updated the Commission on the travel and tourism industry for downtown Baton Rouge

Ms. Alford announced the upcoming meetings and conventions coming to Baton Rouge:

- January – The Louisiana Marathon – 5000 attendees
- February – Louisiana High School Wrestling Tournament – 2,500 attendees
- February – Louisiana State Senior Beta Club – 6,500 attendees
- March – Purple and Gold Gymnastics Classic – 2,500 attendees
- March – Volleyball Louisiana – Baton Rouge Block Party – 8,000 attendees

Ms. Alford stated Visit Baton Rouge, in December, partnered with Arrivalist, a visitation intelligence research company. Arrivalist’s software uses cellphone locations of visitors over the age of 18 and tracks the areas of Baton Rouge most visited. The data is available to Visit Baton Rouge and business owners wanting to see where tourists spend the most time.

Arrivalist Research showed the following statics in 2021 for the downtown area:

- 671,333 trips downtown in 2021
- An average of 8.3 hours spent downtown
- Stayed an average of 1.3 nights

D. Spanish Town Mural – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the Spanish Town Mural Walls Project & Gateway Master Plan. Mr. Gabe Vicknair noted the area at North Street and I-110 is one of the most visible of areas to out-of-town visitors coming into downtown from the airport and is not very attractive. The area has been on the DDD’s radar for a while, as far as the overall master plan to beautify the areas under the interstate. DDD has been working with the Walls Project, the Spanish Town neighborhood, and some community members to work on a murals wall project for this area. The Walls Project will issue an RFP to area artists who will submit designs and proposals and then be presented to the Spanish Town neighborhood for their input. The projected budget for the project is \$30,000, which will be raised by fundraising and donations.

E. Downtown Mardi Gras Parades – Mr. Casey Tate briefed the Commission on the return of the downtown Mardi Gras Parades. The Krewe of Mutts kicks off the parades on February 13 and ends with the Spanish Town parade on February 26.

F. New Businesses:

- **Main Lobby** – The Main Lobby is now open; the former Hound Dogs has been renovated into a rooftop bar and upscale cocktail lounge. The grand opening was held Saturday, February 5.
- **APTIM** – Aptim, an engineering and environmental consulting firm is relocating its headquarters to the Water Campus this fall and will house 50-60 employees.

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

- Mardi Gras Mambo 10K/15K, Saturday, February 12, 2022
- Mardi Gras Festival –February 26, 2022, at Town Square
- Pretty in Pink – Spanish Town House Decorating Contest, Tuesday, March 1, 2022
- Manship Theatre – G. Love & The Juice, Thursday, February 17, 2022
- LSU/MOA – Opening Reception State of the Art: Record & Kellie Romany, March 10th, 6 PM
- Capitol Park Museum – Free admission every third Thursday, February 17, 2022
- Old State Capitol – Now open!
- River Center Events – Rent 25th Anniversary Farewell Tour, February 15, 2022
- LASM – Stargazing in the Planetarium, every Saturday at 10:00 AM
- USS Kidd – Cinema Judaica: The Wars 1939-1949, through March 31
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – Saturday, March 5th, 2022

9. Ongoing Projects:

- **DBA** – None
- **BREDA** – Allison Flynn, BREDA Development Director, announced a Valentine Pop-Up market inside Main Street Market on Monday, February 14, 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM. Fletcher Farm will have both fresh strawberries and sets of chocolate-covered strawberries for your Valentine! Red Stick Spice has teas, olive oils, and specialty balsamic vinegars for foodies. You can also pick up gift sets of locally-made goat's milk soaps from Farm Life. Make plans to pick up lunch from one of the

Market's cafes and shop for a special local gift for that someone special. Health-conscious sweethearts will appreciate a wellness gift from Our Daily Bread or a healthy cookbook from Nettye Johnson. Red Stick Farmer's Market will be closed Saturday, February 26th for the Spanish Town Parade.

10. Public Comment: Mysti Byrnes with the Arts Council announced an event, *Healing History*, an art exhibition through February 24 in the Shell Gallery. Ms. Byrnes thanked everyone who attended the Arts Council grand opening on January 20. Other events can be viewed at artsbr.org

Mary Durusau, Director of the Old State Capitol, stated the Capitol is officially open again after completing its cyclical maintenance. The current exhibit is "Changing Landscapes", photographs Along the Solomon Northup Trail by Jan Beauboeuf, which documents the current landscape of sites chronicled in Solomon Northup's Twelve Years a Slave. Ms. Durusau invites the public to attend a Black History Month presentation entitled "Understanding Baton Rouge's Black Cemeteries" at 6 p.m. on February 17.

Daniel Stetson, Director of the LSU Museum of Art, announced the ceramics exhibition ends this Sunday. The museum will have two live ceramics demonstrations today and tomorrow in the gallery by artist Jessica Brandl, the cost is free these two days. A national touring project, *State of the Art 2020*, will be on view: March 10–June 19, 2022. This exhibition and its programming are sponsored locally by a generous grant from Art Bridges. Support also by LSU MOA Annual Exhibition Fund donors.

Ms. Melanie Montanaro announced that DDD's interim director, Gabe Vicknair will be leaving the DDD at the beginning of March for other employment opportunities. Ms. Montanaro stated that an executive director is only as good as his staff. Even though Davis received all the accolades, Gabe and the rest of the staff have been the behind the scene players putting in all the hours and the work to make sure all of the projects have been so successful. Ms. Montanaro wished him well and thanked him for all of his hard work and 13 years of service to the DDD.

11. Meeting Adjourned – Ms. Erin Monroe-Wesley moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Eric Dexter seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned.