

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

January 11, 2022 8:00 a.m.

River Center Branch Library, 250 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: Lisa Nice, Rachel Carroccio, Sarah Gardner, Karron Alford, Geraldine Bordelon, Jouedan Mackey, Susie Anders, Landon Hester, Justin Lemoine, Chris Chandler, Darlene Rowland, Rosehn Gipe, Janson Langlois, Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman, Deon Guillory, Gabriel Rice, Aaron Mollwa, Jude Melville, Judy Foust, Johnathon Dziuba, Caroline Byrne, Sondra Mott, Gary Black, Sarah Amacker, Reginal Kirton, Grant Miller, Gabe Vicknair, Casey Tate, Ute Cress

1. Ms. Melanie Montanaro called the meeting to order and declared a quorum. Ms. Montanaro thanked the library for hosting the DDD meeting.
2. Ms. Montanaro made a motion to amend the agenda to add an item for a step increase for Mr. Gabe Vicknair, Interim Executive Director. This step increase is an annual merit increase for city-parish employees. Mr. Eric Dexter seconded the motion to amend the agenda. There was no opposition, and the motion was approved to amend and approve the agenda.
3. Mr. Eric Dexter made a motion to approve the minutes from November 9, 2021, and the December 14, 2021 minutes and agenda. Mr. Jude Melville seconded the motion, there was no opposition and the minutes and agenda were approved.
4. **Board Action:** Ms. Melanie Montanaro presented the Commission the proposed slate of 2022 officers as follows: Melanie Montanaro, Chairman; Eric Dexter Vice Chairman; Jude Melville, Treasurer, and Prescott Bailey, Secretary. Mr. Scott Hensgens moved to adopt the nominees as presented, Ms. Erin Monroe Wesley seconded and the nominees were unanimously approved as presented for an additional year.

Ms. Montanaro explained the item that was added to the agenda to the Commission. Traditionally, city-parish employees receive a step (merit) increase every year. The board hasn't had to approve an increase for Mr. Davis Rhorer, who previously held the Executive Director position, because he was a retiree re-hire and was at the top of his salary. Ms. Montanaro stated she spoke with the city-parish administrator and was informed that the board will need to recommend a step increase for Mr. Vicknair. Ms. Montanaro made a motion to approve a one-step increase from step 8 to

step 9 in the pay range for the Executive Director for Mr. Gabe Vicknair. Mr. Eric Dexter seconded the motion, there was no opposition and the motion was unanimously approved.

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. Emergent Method has updated and finalized the job description, they are currently finalizing the search committee and once that is completed the job will be posted.

7. Development Initiatives:

- A. River Center Theatre Update** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the River Center Theatre under construction. Lisa Nice, Architect/Post Architects updated the Commission on the status of the work. Ms. Nice stated they are finally getting near the end of completion. They have had delays due to unforeseen conditions with construction, in addition to labor and product shortages due to the pandemic and Hurricane Ida. The plaza area will not be completed for the first event, once again due to unforeseen construction conditions. Ms. Nice showed updated renderings showing the addition of the front of the theatre where the lobby area has been increased more than double in size. By installing glass on the front of the building, and by shifting the front entrance slightly toward the Mississippi River and away from the City Hall building opposite the plaza, visitors will have a wider, more appealing view of Repentance Park, the Old State Capitol, and the river itself. Photos show a new elevator tower in the front of the theatre in addition to 3 new elevators in the theatre public spaces for ADA accessibility. In the auditorium, the former continental-style seating, defined by long, uninterrupted rows, has been replaced by seating punctuated by central aisles. This will make it more convenient for patrons to get up and move around when necessary. The seats themselves will be larger, a jump from between 17 to 19 inches to between 20 to 22 inches. There will also be new higher-end box seating with beverage consoles and easy access to concession stations. A reception space was added on the second level and additional restrooms; overall all aspects of the theatre have been improved. The theatre is scheduled to be mostly completed by the first event of the season, a Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra performance on Jan. 27. Gabe Vicknair stated the DDD staff has been helping with the location of the Mestrovic sculptures in the plaza area and landscaping for planters around the theatre plaza and City Hall.
- B. Rural Sourcing** – Mr. Monty Hamilton, CEO/Rural Sourcing, updated the Commission on the status of a new software development company, Rural Sourcing, which will bring in 150 high tech, high paying new jobs to downtown. Mr. Hamilton stated if he had 100 digital software development employees, he could put them to work tomorrow. The Commission

viewed a short video about Rural Sourcing. Mr. Hamilton stated they chose Louisiana, and specifically Baton Rouge, because of its broad and diverse talent pool and more than 50,000 graduating students in the region. Rural Sourcing wants to hire a diverse group of software development employees, their mission is to create thousands of technology jobs in the United States. Baton Rouge was chosen after many years of research and there are so many people preparing for careers in technology services at LSU, Southern University, and BR Community College.

C. Rivermark Centre – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the construction at I Rivermark Centre (south tower) which is a mixed-use development with high-end residential units, office, and ground-floor retail. Mr. Gary Black, representing Wampold Companies, explained the Rivermark logo’s concept and showed an image of the rooftop amenity to be utilized for meetings and events. The upper 11 floors, once occupied by Albemarle, are being converted into high-end residential units. Wampold Companies is also renovating the lower five floors of the building, which will remain as office space. Chase, which once occupied several floors, confirmed months ago that it is downsizing its footprint in the building but will retain one floor of office space and a retail presence on the ground floor. The first three floors of multifamily in I Rivermark Centre are tentatively scheduled for completion in mid-2022.

D. 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 that Visit Baton Rouge has launched its tourism survey on January 3. The survey will help determine opportunities for potential amenities, programs, products, and experiences that would benefit the tourism industry in Baton Rouge as part of their 5-year strategic plan. It will allow VBR to have a better idea of what the city needs to do to become more attractive to visitors.

Ms. Alford introduced two Visit Baton Rouge employees, Ms. Geraldine Bordelon, Director of Destination Sales & Experience, and Ms. Jouredan Mackey, who just recently joined VBR over Domestic Group and International Travel.

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

The riverboats are continuing to cruise to Baton Rouge beginning in February. There will be more riverboats in 2022 than in 2021. In 2021, there were about 100 dockings, and VBR is anticipating 150 dockings in 2022. Ms. Alford stated despite record COVID cases in the

U.S., Americans' overall travel sentiment has improved. Those in a ready-to-travel state of mind rose to 77.9%—up from 76.0% in December and among the highest levels since the start of the pandemic; excitement for leisure travel has also increased.

E. Downtown Public Art Restoration – Ms. Sarah Gardner with Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAAF) is the project manager of civic leadership initiatives at the foundation. BRAAF recently renovated the Martin Luther King sculpture and is conducting an additional assessment of 25 sculptures in the downtown area to be restored. The foundation is currently in the process of waiting for approval from the Metro Council to start restoring nine of the works. All of the proceeds for the restorations will be privately funded. Funds have been raised to begin on the Oliver Pollack statue and the Galvez Fountain.

F. Outdoor Dining Grant Update – Mr. Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on the status of the outdoor dining grant. The Downtown Development District is offering a grant to local businesses to implement new or improve existing outdoor dining at their establishments. Currently, they have only 4 applications, the grant has been available since September 2021 but so far, only four businesses have applied, leaving six open slots. As the pandemic is changing everyday life as we know it, outdoor dining is becoming more common.

G. 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. Due to COVID and other unforeseen circumstances, the project has been delayed. Plans are to begin the crosswalk improvements by the end of the month.

H. New Businesses:

- **Chelsea's Live** – Mr. Grant Miller, owner, of Chelsea's Live, announced the first live show is scheduled for Friday, January 14, 2022, with Loudness War and Quarx, before headliner The Iceman Special takes the stage. The iconic neon Chelsea's logo sign is finally up.

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

- Red Stick Revelry – Recap
- Louisiana Marathon –January 15-16, 2022
- MPAC – Grand Opening Party, January 20, 2022
- Manship Theatre – The Coasters, January 21, 2022, 7:30 PM
- LSU/MOA – Ceramic Demos with Jessica Brandl, February 8 & 9, 2022
- Capitol Park Museum – Free admission every third Thursday.
- Old State Capitol – Re-opening Tuesday, January 18, 2022
- 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, January 14, 2022
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – Saturday, February 5th, 2022

9. Ongoing Projects:

- **DBA** – Mr. Casey Tate announced there will be a board evening tonight and will discuss spring events, including Live After Five.
- **BREADA** – Ms. Darlene Rowland announced eating fresh and local this January by shopping at the Red Stick Farmers Market for all the best locally sourced produce! Sign up below to take the #RedStickFresh pledge and share your journey of enjoying local with us on social media for a chance to enter the challenge prize drawing! Be sure to use the hashtag #RedStickFresh and tag @redstickfarmersmarket on Instagram for a chance to be featured!

10. Public Comment: Mr. Deon Guillory with the Arts Council wanted to announce the grand opening of the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center celebration, MPAC, on Thursday, January, 20th.

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