

## **DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES**

November 9, 2021 8:00 a.m.

Cary Saurage Community Arts Center, 233 St. Ferdinand Street

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

**Absent:** Mr. Prescott Bailey-Secretary

**Others in Attendance:** Karron Alford, Stacy Simon, Mary Jane Marcantel, Chris Chandler, Julia Claire Evans, Tim Boone, Rene Chatelain, Cheri Soulieu, Mysti Byrnes, Cheri Soileau, Lucas Lognion, Garrett Kemp, Eric Marshall, Justin Lemoine, Chad Cornett, Aaron Mollura, Brooke Goodrich, Taylor Jacobsen, Allison Tohme Flynn, Gary Jupiter, David Rhymes, Daniel Stetson, John Kaufman, Darlene Roland, Frederick Sargent, Collen Rials, Serena Pandos, Rannah Gray, Andre Moreau, Chad Barnett, Chris Nichols, John Kelton, Brandon Songy, Landon Hester, Gabe Vicknair, Casey Tate, Ryan Benton, Ute Cress

1. Ms. Melanie Montanaro called the meeting to order.

Mrs. Montanaro thanked Ms. Renee Chatelain for hosting the DDD meeting at their new facility. Ms. Chatelain, Arts Council President and CEO, welcomed everyone to the Cary Saurage Community Arts Center which also houses the Arts Council and the Baton Rouge Symphony along with some local artists. A tour is scheduled after the meeting or you can walk through on your own. There is an art exhibit in the Shell Gallery, celebrating Together Baton Rouge's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this is a photography exhibit of 100 people who have impacted Baton Rouge.

2. Ms. Melanie Montanaro declared a quorum.

3. Mr. Eric Dexter made a motion to approve the agenda, Mr. Jude Melville seconded and the agenda was approved.

4. Mr. Eric Dexter made a motion to approve the minutes from October 12, 2021 and the October 20, 2021 special meeting, Mr. Patrick Michaels seconded and the minutes were approved.

**5. Board Action** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair informed the Commission the 2022 Budget was distributed at last month's meeting and is asking for approval to move forward with this budget. Ms. Melanie Montanaro made a motion to approve the budget as submitted and was seconded by Mr. Eric Dexter. All Commission members were unanimously in favor and the motion passed.

## 6. Governmental Issues:

- Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission on the current Covid-19 orders. Governor John Bel Edwards, lifted the statewide mask mandate for all settings except for K-12 schools. K-12 schools must have mask mandate or follow CDC quarantine guidance.

**7. Update from previous Board meeting – Executive Director Search** – Ms. Melanie Montanaro updated the Commission regarding the search for an executive director. Following last month’s meeting, a special meeting was held on October 20, 2021. The board voted unanimously on the top scoring firm, Emergent Method, be hired on the terms of their proposal to aid in its executive director search and is awaiting final approval of a contract. The Commission will then form a search committee, create a job description and develop a recruitment strategy.

## 8. Development Initiatives

### A. Developments Underway:

- **Chelsea’s Live** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on the renovation of Chelsea’s Live, located at 1010 Nicholson Drive. Chelsea’s Live is well underway on the interior and they have the first shows scheduled for late November and private events for December. They plan on doing some exterior painting next month.
- **The Main Lobby** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on the renovation of The Main Lobby located at 668 Main Street. Mr. Vicknair stated he spoke with the developer Cornelius Quarels and said he has a hearing with the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board November 19<sup>th</sup>, potentially clearing the way for a soft opening in late November or December.
- **Downtown East Housing** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, a map outlaying the housing developments in the Downtown East area and images of the ongoing construction and a proposed bike connection. Mr. Gabe Vicknair updated the Commission on the status of the following housing projects in Downtown East, where there are over 400 units currently under construction:
  - a. **Valencia Park, Spanish Town Road** – Construction is currently underway; the development will consist of 110 residential units of which 80% of the units will be government assisted. They are pre-leasing this fall with an opening in the spring of 2022.
  - b. **Lotus Village, Council on Aging, Spanish Town & 16<sup>th</sup> Streets** – Construction has started and is at the framing stages. The 116-unit development is a new senior

housing development and is aimed at low to moderate income seniors, hoping to be open by July 2022.

- **Hollywood Casino Expansion** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of initial construction underway at the Hollywood Casino, such as land clearing and demolition and some foundation work. During the time of construction, Hollywood Casino plans on opening a temporary location for sportsbook betting.
  - **River Center Theatre** - The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of the River Center Theatre currently under construction. Mr. Gabe Vicknair informed the Commission the construction is moving along and has its' first booking scheduled for January 27<sup>th</sup>. The work in the Mestrovic Plaza is ongoing.
- A. Downtown Security Cameras** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission of the status of the downtown security cameras. Installation has begun on the 29 new cameras, which have a 360-degree view, and plan to have the installation completed by the end of November.
- B. Hospitality and Tourism Update** - Ms. Karron Alford, Director of Marketing/Visit Baton Rouge, updated the Commission on the travel and tourism industry for downtown Baton Rouge. Ms. Alford stated tourism in downtown Baton Rouge continues to be on the upswing. Events are being scheduled at a level they have not seen since March 2020. They were several conventions recently, including two airport conventions, one on October 24-26 and Takeoff on November 1-3. Other conventions scheduled in November are Kampgrounds of America (KOA) – November 14-18 and LSU Family Weekend – November 12.
- C. Bus Rapid Transit Tour**– Ms. Cheri Soileau Director for Planning and Program Development with Capital Area Transit System (CATS), briefed the Commission on the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) tour. CATS hosted a tour of the BRT project Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup> ahead of upcoming plans. Ms. Soileau shared a pamphlet with the Commission, Be Right There, which outlines the routes. The new proposed Bus Rapid Transit System will streamline mass transit in Baton Rouge, speeding up routes across the city, and moving people from point to point in an efficient way. Currently, only one route is in the works for Baton Rouge. CATS is working to streamline mass transit through Plank Road from North Baton Rouge into downtown Baton Rouge. The route would have 22 stops; the nine-mile route is to run along Plank Road, Florida Boulevard (downtown) and terminating at LSU on Nicholson Drive. The entire route would take 41 minutes, but each stop would have a bus coming through every 15 minutes during peak hours, 20-minute peaks during the later afternoon and 30-minute headways on the weekends. The project is slated to begin operating during the later portion of 2024.

- D. Baton Rouge Area Souvenir Shop (BRASS)** – Mr. Garret Kemp and Luke Lognion, owners of BRASS, briefed the Commission on the opening of a new gift and souvenir shop for tourists and residents to be located at 327 North Boulevard. Mr. Longion stated 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 such as ornaments, magnets, alligator heads and postcards, in addition to gift items such as, jewelry, candles, tea towels and home décor for locals. They intend to be open past 5:00 PM and hope to be open by December 3<sup>rd</sup> for the Festival of Lights.
- E. Grant Updates - AARP Crosswalk and River Roads Recreation Trails Grants** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair informed the Commission on two grants which have recently been awarded to DDD. The AARP Community Challenge Grant for crosswalk was approved by Council last week. The project is out for bids and should have all three bids in by the end of the week. The River Road Recreational Trails Grant was also approved by Council last week to extend the 10' multi-use pathway along River Road to Hollywood Casino and north to two large residential complexes. This will connect residents to safe bicycle and pedestrian pathways including the Mississippi River Levee Trail and the Downtown Greenway. DDD has been in discussion with Bonton Engineering to do the design on this project.
- 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 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. All the private funds raised go to having entertainment for New Year's Eve. Ms. Karron Alford with Visit Baton Rouge has scheduled the largest advertising campaign they have ever had for this event with billboards, digital and radio advertising.

Mr. Andre Moreau, emcee for the event, stated this is the 9<sup>th</sup> year for Red Stick Revelry, making Baton Rouge a destination for New years Eve. Mr. Moreau introduced Mr. Chad Barnett, City President of Bank Plus, as the 2021 presenting sponsor of this year's event. 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.

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

- Turkey Trot 5K – Thursday, November 26<sup>th</sup>
- Festival of Lights – Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> 4 PM – 8 PM
- Cortana Kiwanis Christmas Parade – Saturday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 6 PM
- Sunday in the Park/Lafayette Park – Shaw Center Plaza - November 14<sup>th</sup>
- Movies After 5 – Outdoor movies presented by DBA, Sunday, November 14<sup>th</sup> 5:30 PM Town Square – The Goonies
- 13<sup>th</sup> Gate Haunted House – Open through November 13<sup>th</sup>
- Preserve Louisiana/Old Governor’s Mansion – The First Ladies of the Old Governor’s Mansion Exhibit until January, 2022
- Manship Theatre – Peabo Bryson, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 7:00 PM
- LSU MOA – The Boneyard Exhibition Tour & Mug Workshop, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 6:00 PM
- Capital Park Museum – The Yellow Book: Old South Baton Rouge, Photography Exhibition Reception, November 30<sup>th</sup>
- Old State Capitol – Manufacturing Victory, November 11<sup>th</sup> @5:00 PM, Victory Gardens to Sustainable Gardening
- River Center Events – The Millennium Tour 2021 (R&B and Hip Hop), November 17<sup>th</sup> 7 P M
- LASM – Holly Yashi Trunk Show, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM
- USS Kidd – Wheels of War Traveling Exhibit – now open
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – Saturdays, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>

## 10. Ongoing Projects:

- **DBA** – Mr. Casey Tate stated Lauren Lambert with DBA was not able to attend today’s meeting, she is out on maternity leave.
- **BREADA** – Ms. Darlene Rowland stated the farmers are recovering from Hurricane Ida and there is plenty of fall produce available at the market. Satellite locations at Pennington on Perkins, EBRP Main Library on Goodwood and the ExxonMobil YMCA on Howell Boulevard are open. Ms. Rowland stated they had a fabulous 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration this past weekend with the largest crowd she’s seen in quite a while. The 25<sup>th</sup> annual fund drive has begun and you can go to <https://breada.org> to donate. Ms. Rowland wanted to thank the Atchafalaya National Heritage Fund for their support for the anniversary activities. In addition, Ms. Rowland stated \$100,000.00 was raised at Farm Fete to help out the small farmers for relief due to Hurricane Ida and wanted to thank everyone for their donations and support. Ms. Rowland introduced Allison Tohme, as the new BREADA Development Director.

## 11. Public Comment:

Mr. Daniel Stetson, Executive Director, LSU/MOA welcomed BRASS to downtown and wanted to point out that LASM & LSU Museum of Art both have wonderful gift shops for all occasions. The museums will be open through the holidays, except for the holidays themselves. Mr. Stetson is

excited for all the activities and boats returning to downtown. The LSU/MOA gift shop will be open during the Festival of Lights and have a special sale that evening.

Mr. Landon Hester, Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX), announced this year's Center for Planning Excellence's 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Growth Summit will again be presented virtually, November 16<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> free to all attendees. This year's summit will focus on "Shaping Our Future." Sponsorships are open and you can register for the summit at [summit.cpex.org](http://summit.cpex.org).

Ms. Serena Pandos, President and Executive Director of LASM, announced the museum is open and active duty military, first responders, veterans, and their families receive free admission as part of the Blue Star Museums Program, sponsored by VFIS Special Risk Insurance. Free admission to the museum, which includes unlimited Irene W. Pennington Planetarium shows, is available every first Sunday of the month, sponsored by Mr. Madison Lamar. LASM just received two grants, one from Union Pacific and the other from Healthy Blue Cross Blue Shield to take free virtual education programs back into the classrooms who haven't been able to make it back into the museum experience. LASM is beginning to welcome students back, approximately 400 students visited last week.

Mr. Frederick Sargent with Electronic Media introduced himself as the company that has the "walking billboards" downtown and wanted everyone to know that have students from LSU & Southern working for them. They have many different types of advertising opportunities for advertising your businesses.

Mr. Gabe Vicknair stated that this will be Mr. Ryan Benton's last meeting as he will be unfortunately moving on from the DDD. We appreciate his contributions while he was here and wish him the best.

Ms. Renee Chatelain stated that the EBRP School System have a very vibrant new superintendent, Dr. Sito Narcisse who recognizes the importance of visual performing arts and they role they play in the role of the community's success. The Arts Council is working with him to reconnect performing groups to different conventions and public events and is working as the liaison for scheduling the performers.

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