

DDD Commission Meeting
October 12, 2021 8:00 a.m.
Capitol Park Museum, 660 N. 4th Street

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

Absent: None

Others in Attendance: Karron Alford, Mary Jane Marcantel, Lieutenant TC Lam, Captain Murial Hall, Mary Durusau, Chris Chandler, Julia Claire Evans, Tim Boone, Mysti Byrnes, Judy Faust, Rafa Amaya, Jason Langlois, Anne Mahoney, Aaron Mollura, Aly Bockler-Blanche, Colleen Rials, Rachel Carroccio, Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman, Rodneya Hart, Brandon Songy, Joey Furr, Landon Hester, Gabe Vicknair, Casey Tate, Ryan Benton, Ute Cress

1. Ms. Melanie Montanaro called the meeting to order.
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 September 14, 2021 minutes, Mr. Jude Melville seconded and the minutes were approved.

5. Board Action – None

6. Governmental Issues:

- Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission on the current Covid-19 orders. Governor John Bel Edwards, extended the statewide mask mandate until October 27, 2021. The mask mandate applies to anyone age 5 or older in all public places statewide.
- Mr. Gabe Vicknair presented the Commission the DDD 2022 Budget Request which will be introduced to the Metro Council in October and voted on in November.

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, proposals were received from three consulting firms. Immediately following this meeting, an Executive Committee is being held to discuss and select one of the firms. The selection will be voted on by the full board at a special meeting at a later date.

8. Development Initiatives

A. Developments Underway:

- **Dedication of Rhorer Plaza** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission on the dedication of the renaming of City Hall Plaza to Davis S. Rhorer Plaza prior to the first Live After Five Concert of 2021 on October 1st. Mr. Rhorer’s son, Mr. Davis Rhorer, Jr. presented a plaque celebrating the life and legacy of Davis Rhorer and his 34 years of dedication to the revival of Downtown Baton Rouge. Mr. Vicknair stated City Hall Plaza 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.
- **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 and they are booking shows and private events for 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. **Elysian III, North Street** – Construction is completed and they are now leasing. These are residential apartments, with a total of 42 units.
 - b. **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.
 - c. **Lotus Village, Council on Aging, Spanish Town & 16th 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.
- **Hollywood Casino Expansion** – The Commission viewed, via PowerPoint, images of initial construction underway at the Hollywood Casino, such as land clearing and demolition.
- **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 however, due to Hurricane Ida and supplies issues, the completion date is being postponed until early 2022.

- 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 showed the Commission, via PowerPoint, a bar chart displaying the hotel occupancy

and rates. Year to date, there is a 56.2% average occupancy in 2021, compared to 31.5% in 2020 and 50.9% average occupancy in 2019. Some of the increase in numbers is a result of Hurricane Ida. Average daily rates at the hotels have decreased however, from \$126.80 in 2019 to \$118.19 in 2021. The goal is to get back to 2019 rates.

Ms. Alford stated there are several conventions scheduled in the next couple of months, 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.

- A. CATS Downtown Circulator** – Ms. Cheri Soileau Director for Planning and Program Development with Capital Area Transit System (CATS), briefed the Commission. Ms. Soileau stated CATS is asking for voters to renew a 10-year, 10.6 millage dedicated tax in November, which serves as their main source of funding to support the daily operations and provide service to thousands of customers each month. In 2019, CATS provided more than 2.5 million passenger trips. More than 93 percent of CATS customers use the system at least three days per week, and 76 percent of riders utilize the system more than five days per week. During the pandemic, CATS never stopped operations and continues to operate lifeline services to those relying upon the agency to get to work, supporting sectors that include local healthcare facilities, schools, grocery stores, and restaurants.

Ms. Soileau stated CATS is working on a downtown circulator to replace the Capitol Park Trolley, which ceased operations prior to COVID-19. The circulator will include two 30-foot electric buses that will run a new route through downtown, from the River Center to Capitol Lake, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. with 15-minute wait times. Mr. Eric Dexter asked if there was a way to track a bus in order to determine where it is on the route. Mr. Soileau said at this time it is not possible, the buses are being leased and cannot put a GPS on them. CATS has ordered buses and once those come in they are able to track them. Mr. Gabe Vicknair stated once the new buses come in, he would like to collaborate with CATS to help with the branding of the downtown busses. Mr. Vicknair asked the board to consider adding the Downtown Development District to the list of supporters for the CATS tax renewal.

- B. Commercial Pedal Carriages** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair briefed the Commission on the status of pedal carriages in East Baton Rouge. The Metro Council recently approved ordinances which regulate operating areas, routes, gathering, boarding locations, hours of operation, noise and disturbance. Pedal carriages can now apply with the Baton Rouge Taxicab Control Board to offer their services to downtown patrons. DDD recently meet with Pedal Pub to discuss their proposed routes within the downtown area and have been submitted to the Taxicab Control Board for approval. They would like to be operating by Southern University’s Homecoming and begin training their drivers.
- C. AARP Crosswalk and River Roads Recreation Trails Grants** – Mr. Gabe Vicknair informed the Commission on two grants which have recently been awarded to DDD; they will be going to

the Metro Council for approval this week. DDD was awarded \$25,000 from the AARP Community Challenge Grant for crosswalk improvements on Third Street for three or four intersections. The River Road Recreational Trails Grant in the amount of \$85,000 will 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. These two items will be introduced to the Metro Council this Wednesday, October 13th and for council approval on October 27th.

D. Louisiana Avenue Update - Mr. Gabe updated the Commission on the status of Louisiana Avenue. Mr. Gabe Vicknair stated DDD has received the final draft of the conceptual lighting plan and hope to begin the implementation of the electrical plans soon. A safety grant, Safe Route for Public Spaces, will also be going to Council for approval. The grant is for pedestrian improvements from the area underneath the interstate, down Louisiana Avenue to 13th Street and ultimately connecting to the bike path on Government Street. Once the agreement between the city and state is in place, DOTD will facilitate design of the plan.

Final drawings of the Louisiana Avenue Connection plan will be going to DOTD this week and hopefully will be bid and begin construction soon. Mr. Vicknair stated they have been in conversation with the BR Walls Project to possibly incorporate some artistic renderings/murals/painted columns under the interstate in addition to utilizing the area for other types of uses and programming.

E. New Business: None

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

- Sunday in the Park/Lafayette Park – Shaw Center Plaza - September 26th-November 14th
- Live After Five Rhorer Plaza – Fridays through November 4th
- CAUW Jambalaya Jam – North Boulevard Town Square, Thursday, October 21st
- Movies After 5 – Outdoor movies presented by DBA, Sundays, North Boulevard Town Square
- 13th Gate Haunted House – Open through November 13th
- Nightmare on Third Street – Third Street Halloween Costume Contest, October 30th
- Preserve Louisiana/Old Governor’s Mansion – The First Ladies of the Old Governor’s Mansion Exhibit until January, 2022
- Manship Theatre – Chris Hillman, November 2nd, 7:30 PM
- LSU MOA – Opening Reception – Candice Lin, October 20th, 6:00 PM
- LSU MOA – Free First Sundays are Back! Every First Sunday 1-5 PM
- Capital Park Museum – The Negro Motorist Green Book Exhibition, August 21 – November 14
- Old State Capitol – 5th Annual Spirits of Louisiana, October 28th
- River Center Events – Hollydays, October 13th-16th
- River Center Events – Kevin Gates, October 30th
- LASM – Open Wednesday – Friday 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM, Sunday 1:00 PM -5:00 PM
- LASM – Free First Sundays are back, every first Sunday 1:00 PM – 5:00 PM

- USS Kidd – Wheels of War Traveling Exhibit – now open
- Baton Rouge Arts Market - Saturday, November 6th

10. Ongoing Projects:

- **DBA** – Mr. Casey Tate stated Lauren Lambert with DBA was not able to attend today’s meeting, but DDD is working with DBA on all their public events and with the city administration.
- **BREADA** – Mr. Casey Tate stated Darlene Rowland was not able to attend today’s meeting. Mr. Tate informed the Commission, BREADA just recently held Farm Fete’s online auction which was held Sept. 29-30 to benefit the Red Stick Farmers was a huge success, in addition they helped raise over \$100,000 for the Small Farmers Fund.

11. Correspondence: There was no information to report

12. Public Comment – Ms. Mary Durusau, Director, Old State Capitol, briefed the Commission on an event, the *Spirits of Louisiana*. The event will take place this year at the Louisiana Old State Capitol on Thursday October 28, 2021 beginning at 6:30 p.m. Enjoy the fine catering of Heirloom Cuisine and tastings from numerous local distilleries. Come dressed as the 'Spirit' moves you.

Ms. Anne Mahoney, Capitol Park Museum, briefed the Commission on the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service's (SITES) exhibition "The Negro Motorist Green Book". The exhibition will be on display at the Capitol Park Museum in Baton Rouge from August 21 – November 14, 2021. In addition, Pecha Kucha Night Baton Rouge is back! Join us on Thursday at the Capitol Park Museum from 5:00-5:30 p.m. and enjoy a reception, including wine and refreshments. Presentations will begin at 5:30 p.m. Presentations at Pecha Kucha draw inspiration from the exhibition “The Negro Motorist Green Book”.

Mr. Landon Hester, Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX), announced this year’s Center for Planning Excellence’s 16th Annual Growth Summit will again be presented virtually, November 16th -18th 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.cplex.org.

13. Meeting Adjourned – Mr. Eric Dexter moved to adjourn the meeting, Mr. Prescott Bailey seconded and the meeting was adjourned.