

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

August 11, 2026

Emergent Method, 804 Main Street

Board Members in Attendance: Patrick Michaels - Chairman, Philip Jordan–Vice Chairman, Gary Black – Secretary, Joshua Hollins–Treasurer, Eric Dexter, Susan Turner, and Gary Jupiter

Absentees: None

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Amanda Santos, Elizabeth “Boo” Thomas, Les Nicholson, Jordan Arceneaux, Bridget Geoffrey, Solomon Ona, Sr. Gregg Bailey, Michael Beck, Judy Faust, Chuck Booksh, Claude Gernon, Jr., Debra Hudson, Ianne Salvosa, Hope Robinson, Jacqus Pourciau, Kyle Finke, Elizabeth Dent-Sumrall, Samantha Morgan, Mark E Martin, Derrell Cohoon, Eric Davis, Ted Devall, Susan Bailey, Engin Sayal, Jasmine Thomas, Kelly Sullivan, Danny McGlynn, Lauren Lambert Tompkins, Kennadi Wells, Melanie Montanaro, Mukul Verma, Anna Mayes, Matthew Destouet, Courtney King, Darlene Rowland, John Snow, Anne Mahoney, Johnathan Grimes, Charles Daniel

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting. Whitney introduced and thanked John Snow with Emergent Method for hosting and sponsoring the breakfast for this month’s meeting.

John Snow, Partner with Emergent Method, thanked the Commission for attending and welcomed the group to the company’s new downtown office. He provided an overview of the space, noting that Emergent Method began moving into the former Creative Block co-working space over the holidays. The company has since adapted the space to accommodate its team and highlighted the “Superior Room,” which can accommodate large gatherings and events.

Mr. Snow explained that this is Emergent Method’s fourth downtown office location. The company began on Third Street in the Romain Building with two employees and subsequently moved to several downtown locations as the firm expanded. The new space provides room for the company’s approximately 160 employees and future growth.

Emergent Method is a management consulting firm specializing in strategic and organizational planning, integrated strategic communications, and program and project management. Its work includes disaster recovery, large-scale infrastructure programs, health and human services, and system modernization. While the company now works in approximately 20 states, Mr. Snow emphasized that Baton Rouge, and particularly downtown Baton Rouge, has always been home to Emergent Method. He expressed excitement about the new space and the company’s continued growth and commitment to remaining downtown.

1. Patrick Michaels called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Susan Turner made a motion to approve the agenda. Philip Jordan seconded, and the motion was approved.
3. Gary Jupiter made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 9, 2026, meeting. Gary Black seconded, and the motion was approved.
4. **Board Action:**

- **2027 Budget** – Whitney Hoffman updated the Commission on the 2027 DDD Budget. Whitney reported that, unlike the previous year when the city requested budget scenarios reflecting various levels of cuts, no such scenarios were requested for 2027. Therefore, the DDD is requesting the same general fund allocation received last year, totaling \$111,950. The majority of the DDD’s tax revenue is generated through a property millage that was approved last fall for an additional five years. Projected tax revenue is expected to increase slightly, based on approximately \$772,374 collected in 2025, which was used as a benchmark for the 2027 budget. The higher-than-anticipated 2025 collections have helped buffer the DDD’s budget against potential cuts. Overall, the DDD’s budget remains stable, with consistent funding for operating expenses, supplies, and staffing.

Patrick Michael opened the floor for public comment on the proposed 2027 DDD budget. There being no public comment, the public comment period was closed. The Commission was asked to approve the 2027 DDD budget as presented. It was noted that, pursuant to the bylaws, the Commission approves the annual operating budget and any amendments thereto. Any future changes or reallocations that constitute a budget amendment would require Commission approval.

A motion was made by Susan Turner and seconded by Eric Dexter to approve the 2027 BDD budget as presented. There being no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

5. Governmental Issues:

- **House Bill 213, Act 789** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal provided an update to the Commission on House Bill 213, noting that the legislation serves as a cleanup bill to align the DDD’s bylaws with its governing legislation. The bill was signed by the Governor and became effective August 1, 2026.
- **Plan Baton Rouge III** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on Plan Baton Rouge III, stating that the Metro Council approved the plan in June. In connection with the Governor’s comments regarding the River Center and its relationship to the riverfront, a public hearing is scheduled for August 26 regarding River Center management and the selection of a River Center consultant.
- **Historic Preservation Commission:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the Historic Preservation Commission items impacting downtown:
 - HPC-2-26, 438 & 442 Main Street, Demolition (Deferred to 9/9 Meeting)
 - HPC-5-26, 999 N. 9th Street, (Approved)
 - 645 N. 8th Street, Demolition by Neglect (Deferred)
 - 764 Spanish Town Road, Demolition by Neglect (Deferred)

6. Development Initiatives:

- **2026 Development Toolkit** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal provided an update on the annual DDD 2026 Toolkit. The Toolkit is used to monitor the health and performance of downtown, help guide the DDD’s priorities and areas of focus, and provide developers and businesses with key information and statistics about downtown.

This year’s Toolkit continues to include extensive quantitative data while incorporating more qualitative information, including comments and perspectives from residents, business owners, and developers. This additional information is intended to provide a more complete picture of the downtown experience beyond the data alone.

Whitney provided an overview of the updated Downtown Toolkit highlighting several key data points,

accomplishments, and trends:

- **Nexus:** Nexus is preparing to move into its renovated space at 440 Hunter Avenue. The organization is expected to bring employees and increased exposure to hundreds of entrepreneurs in downtown.
- **Downtown Investment:** Total investment in downtown since the creation of the DDD has reached approximately \$3.08 billion. The Toolkit includes a map of major developments valued at more than \$10 million and, this year, also identifies properties that have undergone reinvestment.
- **Property Values:** An analysis conducted with the Tax Assessor's Office found that downtown property values are approximately six times higher than the parish-wide average, highlighting the significant economic and development value of downtown.
- **Visitors and Workers:** Data analysis indicates the central business district has visitors and workers accounting for the majority of daily visits. 7:00 p.m. was identified as the peak visitation time, with Friday and Saturday being the most popular days.
- **Seasonal Impacts:** The Toolkit examines the impact of the college football season and legislative session on downtown activity and hotel occupancy. Approximately 70,000 additional visitors were recorded during the legislative session period.
- **Business Environment:** The total number of businesses downtown remains stable. The Toolkit also includes demographic information on downtown workers and highlights the leading industries, with public administration and professional and technical services ranking among the top industries.
- **Office Market:** Office occupancy remains stable. The presentation noted that Class A office space is increasingly popular, reflecting a national trend associated with changes in remote and hybrid work.
- **Residential:** Downtown residential properties continue to show strong demand, with apartments in the Central Business District maintaining approximately 95% occupancy. Downtown residents are primarily young professionals and empty nesters.
- **Neighborhood Markets:** Neighborhood market values remain strong, averaging approximately \$180 per square foot.
- **Hospitality:** Approximately \$20 million in hotel investment has occurred downtown over the past five years. Downtown hotel occupancy rates remain higher than the parish-wide average. Increased riverboat activity was also noted, with additional agreements and dockings anticipated.
- **Green Space:** The Toolkit highlights investment in downtown green spaces, particularly the central green area around City Hall. Traffic analysis estimates that approximately 2.7 million people view or pass through the space annually.
- **Arts and Culture:** The reopening of the Baton Rouge African American Museum on Juneteenth was highlighted, along with the installation of the Downtown Civil Rights Trail markers during Black History Month. Construction is also underway on the Lincoln Theater.
- **Events:** For the first time, the Toolkit includes economic impact data for major downtown events, providing insight into the effect of events on local businesses and downtown culture.
- **River Center:** Information is included on River Center events, including the return of hockey and the Baton Rouge Kingfish, as well as sales tax revenue generated by River Center activities.
- **Safety:** The Toolkit highlights the City-Parish partnership to upgrade downtown streetlights to LED, DDD-supported extra-duty security patrols, and crime data showing that calls from the 5th

District account for approximately 2.4% of total BRPD calls.

- **Transportation and Development:** Work on BRT and MOVEBR projects is underway, including approximately \$1.7 million in investment in eight downtown transit stops and \$4.2 million in MOVEBR projects downtown.
- **Marketing:** The DDD's weekly newsletter, The Drift, has achieved a 42% open rate, while the organization's social media presence continues to grow.

The updated Downtown Toolkit will be released online later in the day, with printed copies also available. Board members and the public were encouraged to review the full document for additional information and data.

- **Heron II** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the status of the Heron II. Whitney noted that the project aligns with the recommendations of Plan Baton Rouge III and supports the long-term goal of increasing the number of residents living downtown. The site plan has been approved, and the DDD will continue to monitor the project through the remaining approval process. The development is expected to add more than 100 new residential units in the heart of downtown, which is anticipated to support additional retail and business activity.
- **Louisiana Downtown Forum** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission. Whitney stated that when she assumed her position four years ago, she recognized the importance of having all of the Downtown Development Districts (DDD) throughout Louisiana come together to share ideas, experiences, and best practices. As a result, the DDD coordinates an annual meeting among the state's DDDs, with the location rotating each year.
This year's meeting was held in New Orleans in June and included representatives from New Orleans, Lafayette, Shreveport, Lake Charles, and Hammond. The participating DDDs shared updates on initiatives and activities within their respective districts and began discussions on opportunities to collectively advocate for additional housing incentives to support residential development in downtown areas throughout Louisiana.
- **Commercial Building Façade Improvements Grant Program** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the Office of Community Development's Commercial Building Façade Improvement Grant Program, which is currently accepting applications. While certain areas have been identified as priorities, eligible properties generally must be located within a HUD-designated low-to moderate-income area. Eligible improvements include exterior façade enhancements as outlined in the program guidelines. A map identifying eligible areas within the DDD was reviewed, with properties located in the yellow, orange, and red areas eligible to submit an application.
The eligible areas generally include locations north of North Boulevard, portions of Downtown East, and the South Baton Rouge area. Board members and interested parties were encouraged to review the program and contact the DDD office for additional information or assistance with the application process.
- **Phelps Dunbar LLP Office** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal provided an update provided on Phelps Dunbar renovation at Two City Plaza. The business has made a substantial investment of more than \$600,000 in renovating the space and plans to remain downtown. The DDD is pleased to see the continued investment from this long-standing downtown business and hopes to have representatives attend an upcoming Board meeting to provide additional information on the renovation.
- **River Road Multi-Use Paths** – Iboro Udoh provided an update on two River Road projects focused on improving alternative transportation options for pedestrians, cyclists, and individuals requiring ADA accommodations.

River Road West: The project is nearing completion, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony to follow. The

project extends the existing trail along the Mississippi River levee and fills a gap between the Queen Casino and the Hive Apartments/Riverview Condominiums. Previously, pedestrians and cyclists were required to travel in the roadway or cross multiple lanes of traffic. The project was funded 80% through an RTP grant, with the remaining 20% provided locally. Iboro expressed appreciation to the Department of Public Works (DPW) for its assistance in addressing construction issues and working with the contractor to keep the project moving forward.

River Road East: This project is also moving forward, with a contractor selected and construction expected to begin within approximately one month. The project is funded 80% through a DOTD Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant, with the remaining 20% provided locally. In addition to extending the trail, the project will include the planting of additional trees to provide shade and help reduce the heat index. The River Road East project will extend from Convention Street north to Main Street and will address a significant accessibility barrier created by the existing stairs behind the Hilton. The project will remove the stairs and provide a gradual, accessible slope along the pathway, improving connectivity and accessibility for all users. The River Road East project is expected to begin when weather cools.

- **Third Street Parklets** – Iboro Udoh provided on the Third Street Parklet, which is part of the broader Third Street Master Plan developed in partnership with McKnight Landscape. The parklet represents the first phase of a planned series of parklets along Third Street. Iboro described a parklet as a small public space that can provide seating, an area of respite, or space for recreational activities. The first parklet will be located in front of Downtown Seafood on Third Street, within the existing loading and unloading area.

The project is currently in procurement, with the bid opening scheduled for the next day, Wednesday, August 13. Iboro expressed enthusiasm about moving the project forward and noted that the pre-bid meeting generated positive feedback and several questions from contractors. Amanda Barros da Silva Santos, a DDD LSU intern, was also recognized for preparing the project renderings.

- Whitney Hoffman Sayal acknowledged Representative Landry and thanked him for his support of House Bill 213.
- **Downtown Design Studios** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal provided an overview of the DDD's design services for downtown businesses and organizations. The DDD staff and LSU interns develop conceptual designs and renderings that can be used to help organizations pursue grants, secure City funding, or identify other sources of funding for improvements.

One example highlighted was Rue Albritton, the alley space adjacent to the Shaw Center off Third Street. DDD staff and LSU intern Amanda Santos developed renderings exploring opportunities to create a more comfortable indoor and outdoor gathering space for events. Additional concepts considered the potential for the area between the residences and the Shaw Center to serve as a play or activity space. The DDD also presented conceptual designs developed in collaboration with the USS KIDD. The project initially focused on improving pedestrian and vehicular circulation associated with the transition to two-way traffic, removal of street parking, and access to the building. The concept was expanded to explore broader improvements to the area, including:

- Adding street trees and additional landscaping.
- Moving the sidewalk farther from the roadway and creating a landscaped buffer.
- Removing portions of the large walls along the east side to improve the pedestrian environment.
- Expanding and connecting the memorial area to the USS KIDD to create a more cohesive space

for events.

- Improving pedestrian access from the parking garage and levee.
- Exploring a potential relocation of the entrance and souvenir café to the south side of the building.
- Creating an enhanced event space and improving connections between indoor and outdoor areas.
- Relocating the Lone Sailor sculpture to a more prominent location overlooking the river and USS KIDD.
- Exploring modifications to the upper portion of the tower to create an expanded platform area.
- The presentation emphasized that these concepts are intended to help downtown organizations envision potential improvements and explore opportunities for future investment.

Whitney expressed appreciation for the opportunity to work with the USS KIDD on the concepts and invited Les Nicholson to provide additional comments.

Les Nicholson, a representative of the USS KIDD and Veterans Museum, thanked Whitney for the opportunity to address the Commission and shared his enthusiasm for serving on the state commission overseeing the USS KIDD and Veterans Museum. Mr. Nicholson recognized the collaboration with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, DDD staff, and other community organizations and emphasized the USS KIDD's importance as a major Baton Rouge tourist attraction, noting that it has the potential to become an even greater asset to the community. He commended Whitney and DDD staff, including intern Amanda, for developing concepts for improvements to the museum and surrounding property. The concepts will help guide work with outside consultants and support future fundraising efforts to make the museum a "jewel of Baton Rouge." A Toronto-based design firm, recommended by the National WWII Museum, has also expressed interest in assisting with the project.

Mr. Nicholson provided an update on the ship's restoration. The USS KIDD remains at the shipyard in Houma following its extensive overhaul. Its return to Baton Rouge was delayed because Mississippi River levels did not rise sufficiently for the ship to be placed back in its cradle. The ship is now expected to return in spring 2027, when river conditions permit. He appreciated the strong support and involvement of the DDD, city officials, and the Baton Rouge community and his enthusiasm for continuing to advance the vision for the USS KIDD and Veterans Museum.

- **MOVEBR/Bus Rapid Transit** – Casey Tate provided an update on the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project, noting that construction continues to progress with multiple stops planned throughout downtown, including locations on Fourth Street near Two City Plaza and on Florida Street near the Rivermark. The raised platforms will allow level boarding between the buses and sidewalks. The BRT route will connect North Baton Rouge, downtown, and the LSU campus. Bus shelters are being installed with amenities including signage, electrical outlets, and shaded seating, similar to those already completed along Plank Road.
- **Patriotic Banners** – Casey Tate updated the Commission on the placement of patriotic banners on the riverfront and Central Business District (CBD). Funds set aside in the previous year's budget were used for additional promotional and beautification efforts in preparation for America 250. As part of the initiative, American flag banners were installed along the levee, with plans to expand the displays to Third Street, Fourth Street, and other areas of the CBD. The banners were initially installed to enhance the city's appearance for the Fourth of July and will remain in place and be rotated as long as possible.
- **Downtown Data Update (Placer.ai)** – Casey Tate updated the Commission on the America 250

celebration along the riverfront. Data from the WBRZ fireworks event showed that approximately 6,800 people attended the fireworks between 8:00 and 9:00 p.m., based on a geofence around the levee steps. Approximately 40% of attendees traveled between 7 and 30 miles to attend the event, demonstrating its regional draw. Additionally, approximately 30% of attendees were identified as young professionals and emerging families, highlighting the event's appeal to these groups.

- **New Businesses: An update was provided on several new and returning downtown businesses:**

- **House Brew** is returning to downtown and will take over the former Social Coffee location on North Street. A soft opening was scheduled for Wednesday, with the grand opening on August 15. The coffee shop is expected to attract state workers as well as visitors from outside downtown.
- **Demi Nola** has reopened on Third Street with a refreshed space offering smoothies and a juice bar.
- **Desiderata's Kitchen** is now open. The business primarily provides catering services but also hosts special dinners and pop-up events. Attendees were encouraged to follow the business on social media for information on upcoming specials and events.

6. **Events** - Schuyler Olson announced recent DDD marketing initiatives, noting significant growth in social media following over the past year. Research indicates that storytelling and collaboration have been particularly effective in increasing engagement. A new "Po' Boys with the Police" series was launched in collaboration with BRPD to highlight the department's partnership with the DDD and discuss downtown safety and the officers' experiences downtown. The first video, featuring Whitney and the Police Chief at Downtown Seafood, received more than 8,000 views within its first week. She noted they will continue the series on a quarterly basis.

Schuyler also highlighted a collaboration with the Baton Rouge African American Museum, featuring an interview with Jason Roberts about the museum's history and his mother's connection to it, along with a preview of the museum. The video received approximately 12,000 views.

An additional successful video featured DDD intern Amanda, who documented a day in the life of a DDD intern and shared her experiences working downtown.

Schuyler updated the Commission and provided an overview of upcoming downtown events

- **Down South Believers Block Party** – August 22 at Galvez Plaza.
- **Downtown Busking** – Returning with the Live After Five season, featuring musicians performing around lunchtime in Town Square and at Third Street and Florida Street.
- **Live After Five** – Season begins September 18.
- **Manship Theatre** – Baton Rouge Underground Film Festival, \$5 movie series, and collaborative events with Cat Haven.
- **LSU Museum of Art** – Ongoing exhibits and a new exhibit planned for September.
- **Capital Park Museum** – Discovery Day on September 12.
- **Old State Capitol** – Lewis and Clark map exhibit and current lecture series.
- **Old Governor's Mansion** – Free First Sundays and professional field trip experiences.
- **River Center** – Totally Raw Advantage Fest on August 29, along with upcoming performances including Jersey Boys, Gavin Adcock, Ty Myers, and Koe Wetzell.
- **Louisiana Art & Science Museum** – Upcoming planetarium and studio programs.
- **USS KIDD Veterans Museum** – Strong and Calm Warrior Yoga on the first Saturday of each month.
- **Baton Rouge Arts Market and Farmers Market** – Held every Saturday.

- **Farmers Market** at the Main Street Market.

7. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- **Nexus at 440 Third Street** - Kyle Finke, Chief Administrative Officer of Nexus, provided an update on the organization's upcoming move to 440 Third Street. He expressed enthusiasm about being part of the continued growth and momentum occurring downtown. Mr. Finke reported that construction of Nexus' new space has been underway since earlier this year, with the organization expecting to move in within the next few weeks. A grand opening is planned for later this fall and will be designed as a community-focused event.

Nexus will occupy portions of the building, including the second, eighth, and ninth floors. The second floor will feature an upscale hotel-lobby atmosphere with conference and meeting space seating approximately 155 people. The eighth floor will serve as Nexus' member development space, supporting its role as Louisiana's technology incubator, where technology companies develop and grow their ideas and innovations. The ninth floor will include additional meeting space and administrative offices.

Mr. Finke noted that Nexus is excited to locate downtown and be part of the momentum surrounding Plan Baton Rouge III and the Innovation District. He expressed appreciation for the DDD's support and looked forward to showcasing the new space once completed.

- **Baton Rouge African Museum** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated that representatives from the Baton Rouge African American Museum were unable to attend the meeting to provide an update. She encouraged everyone to view the museum's recent social media reel featuring Jason Roberts, son of Sadie Roberts-Joseph, discussing the museum. Whitney expressed excitement about the museum's reopening and upcoming activities.
- **King Fish Hockey** – Matthew Destouet, Director of Booking and Events, provided an update on the return of the Baton Rouge Kingfish to downtown. The team is expected to play approximately 28–30 home games this season, with the first game scheduled for October 16 at 7:05 p.m. Most Thursday, Friday, and Saturday games will begin at 7:05 p.m., with Sunday games scheduled for approximately 4:05–4:25 p.m.
- Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced that Iboro Udoh will be leaving the DDD to accept a position with the State. She expressed appreciation for his contributions over the past two and a half years, particularly his efforts to move projects forward and get them out for bid. Whitney also thanked him for providing more than a month's notice and for ensuring that his projects were organized and transitioned appropriately.

Whitney expressed appreciation for Iboro's work and wished him success in his new position. Iboro thanked the Commission and staff for the past two and a half years and expressed his appreciation for the DDD's stakeholders.

8. Public Comment:

- Greg Bailey of Spanish Town expressed his appreciation for Iboro and the positive working relationship they developed through projects such as Capital Lakes, as well as tree and landscaping initiatives. He specifically recognized Iboro's responsiveness and contributions to the downtown community, commended Whitney for building a strong team, and expressed his appreciation and support for Iboro and his work with the DDD.

Whitney thanked Mr. Bailey for his comments and expressed the DDD's appreciation for the Spanish Town community, noting that downtown neighborhoods and stakeholders are part of the broader "downtown family."

- Anna Mays of BREADA, the nonprofit organization behind the Red Stick Farmers Market and Main Street Market, provided several updates. She announced that Main Street Market has reopened and highlighted River Roots, the coffee shop located inside the market, which offers ethically sourced Counter Culture Coffee and a variety of locally sourced products, including milk from a local dairy and baked goods from local vendors.

Ms. Mays announced the upcoming Farm Fête, the Red Stick Farmers Market's annual fundraiser, scheduled for September 24 at Main Street Market. The event will feature 13 local restaurants serving farm-fresh bites, cocktails, beer, and wine, along with live music both indoors and outdoors. Tickets are currently available for presale. There is also a statewide raffle, with tickets available for \$20, offering the chance to win more than \$2,000 in local gift cards.

- Kennedy Wells, with the Old State Capitol, announced that the annual Spirit of Louisiana gala is scheduled for October 29 from 6:30 pm – 9:30 pm. Tickets will be available soon. Ms. Wells noted that a new gala planning committee, chaired by Kayla Childress, has been formed to assist with planning the event. The theme will be announced at a later date. Ms. Wells encouraged everyone to save the date and attend, noting that this year's event is expected to be the biggest and best yet.
- Charles Daniel, Geaux Ride Bikes, expressed appreciation to Ibora and the DDD staff for their support and contributions to downtown. He noted that his business will celebrate 10 years of serving downtown, encouraging people to explore downtown by bike and patronize local businesses. He recognized DDD's insight, influence, and continued support of downtown businesses, stating that the business growth and transition over the past decade would not have been possible without the DDD's support. He thanked the DDD Commission and staff for their ongoing efforts and partnership.

9. Meeting adjourned – Eric Dexter moved to adjourn the meeting; Susan Turner seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.