

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

August 12, 2025

Cary Saurage Community Arts Council. 233 St. Ferdinand

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

Absentees: Suzanne Turner

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Christopher Abrahams, Abdullah Nabil, Jonathan Grimes, Steve Haemmerle, Jeff Gober, Andy Pines, Judy Foust, Kelly LeDuff, Will LeBlanc, Barry Gambold, Marian Ramos, Jasmine Thomas, Anna Mayes, Jason Crain, Ianne Salvosa, Chris Meyer, Alysia Guin, Collin Lindrew, Reginald Brumfield, Sebrina Bush Hillard, Morgan Udoh, Kendall Milo, Chuck Books, Leonard Briscoe, Rannah Gray, Mark Martin, Gary Black, Caroline Marse, Elisabeth McKinley, Bridget Gaffney, Mary Durusau, Janee Chanet, Jordan Arceneaux, Charles Daniel, Dr. Pamela Ravare Jones, Addie Duval, Karen Soniat, Kim Mascagni

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting and thanked Jonathan Grimes with the Arts Council for hosting. Mr. Grimes, Arts Council President & CEO, introduced himself and thanked everyone for attending. The Cary Saurage Community Arts Center was renovated approximately four years ago; since then, it has had over 130,000 visitors. Mr. Grimes stated he will give a tour of the building after the meeting. There is a rooftop space, an artist workshop in the back, the Shell Gallery, and the meeting is held in the Virginia and John Noland Black Box Studio.

Mr. Grimes announced the following events:

- Launching today, the 19th River City Jazz Masters is an annual concert series featuring some of the finest jazz artists performing on national and international stages.
- The Louisiana Arts Summit is being held on October 9–10 at the River Center Branch Library.
- The Baton Rouge Region Music Census will open in September. The Baton Rouge Region Music Census is a community-driven project designed to understand the strengths, opportunities, and needs of the local music scene, thereby supporting and growing the area's music community.

Whitney thanked our breakfast sponsor, the Rivermark Center, a residential development in the heart of the central business district.

1. Patrick Michaels called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Gary Jupiter made a motion to approve the agenda, Joshua Hollins seconded, and the motion was approved.
3. Gary Jupiter motioned to approve the minutes from the June 10, 2025, meeting. Eric Dexter seconded, and the motion was approved
4. **Board Action:**
 - **2026 Budget** - Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. We have been asked to prepare three budget scenarios:
 - Same general fund contribution as last year \$125,790

- 2) 6% general fund reduction for \$118,240
- 3) 12% general fund reduction for 110,700

The DDD has a dedicated tax revenue that generates \$733,850 from the properties within our district. Most of the line items in the budget remain the same. There is an increase in subscription services for Placer AI renewal. The subscription helps with BRPD event attendance numbers, allowing them to prepare for security adequately, as well as business development and retail recruitment. A reduction from the City Parish would result in limited project funding, printing marketing materials, new office supplies, equipment, travel, and training. The Mayor's office and the Metro Council will approve the budget at the end of the year.

A motion was made by Philip Jordan and seconded by Gary Jupiter to approve all three budget scenarios; there was no opposition, and the motion passed.

- **September Commission Meeting** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced that the DDD has been holding bi-monthly board meetings; however, they would like to schedule a meeting on September 9 @ 8:00 am. A motion was made by Eric Dexter and seconded by Joshua Hollins to schedule a DDD Commission meeting on Tuesday, September 9, at 8:00 am, location to be determined.

5. Governmental Issues:

- **River Center Project Owner's Representative** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. The Metro Council on June 11 approved the recommendation of the River Center Steering Committee to recommend Hunden's Partners as the River Center project owner's representative.
- **LED Lighting Funds:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. The Metro Council approved funds for Phases 1 and 2 to upgrade LED lighting downtown in partnership with the City Parish. Phase I was approved to include the Central Business District and extend south to Government Street. Phase 2 was approved for Downtown East and a portion of South Baton Rouge. The sodium halide yellow color will soon be a bright white LED color, improving safety. This is a major objective that was realized in the DDD Strategic Plan based on 1,400 surveys and feedback regarding the perception of safety and the feeling of safety at night.
- **EBR Pedestrian & Bicycle Plan Update** - Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. The Metro Council Zoning meeting on July 16th approved the East Baton Rouge Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan updates.
- **Spanish Town Public Servitude Revocation:** Whitney Hoffman briefed the Commission. The Metro Council Zoning on July 16 approved the revocation of a public servitude (RV-3-25) in Spanish Town for a condominium development.
- **Booting Ordinance:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on a booting ordinance. A booting ordinance is being introduced at the August 13 Metro Council meeting and will go to a public hearing on August 27. Private parking property owners' contract with booting companies that boot your vehicle if you haven't paid to park. There is currently no cap fee established to remove the boot. A review of rules and fees from other southern metropolitan cities such as Birmingham and Atlanta, revealed a need to determine a cap. The proposed ordinance would establish a capped fee of \$75 to remove the boot, in addition to installing signage regarding booting, and a phone number to call when the car is booted. This ordinance pertains to any private lot in the city parish.
- **Historic Preservation Commission:** A few Spanish Town properties are going before the Historic Preservation Commission on August 13 at 8:30 am:

- HPC 12-25 - 821 Costello Lane, new single-story duplex
- HPC 14-25 – 840 North 8th Street, replace windows

Additional information can be found at the Historic Preservation website.

- **Office of Community Development 5-Year Consolidated Plan** – Kelly LeDuff, Director of the Office of Community Development, briefed the Commission. The City of Baton Rouge's Office of Community Development is currently working on its 2025-2029 Five-Year Consolidated Plan, a comprehensive strategy that guides the allocation of federal housing and community development funds. Community input is being collected through surveys and public meetings to help shape the plan, which focuses on affordable housing, community development needs, and economic opportunities across East Baton Rouge Parish, including the downtown area.

One of the initiatives being considered is a public-private partnership, and DDD plays a significant role in that plan. This includes patio extensions to improve public spaces, beer gardens, artwork, storefront facades, building facades, and funds for low- to moderate-income residents. Recently, almost \$40 million in grant funding was secured for the City Parish working with lobbyists in Washington, D.C. Downtown development remains a central focus, and the DDD will be involved in every discussion related to it.

6 Development Initiatives:

- **2025 Downtown Development Toolkit** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on the 2025 Downtown Development Toolkit. The DDD Toolkit will be uploaded to the DDD website tomorrow, and a press release will be sent out. Below is the data that is in the document:
 - Investment - \$2.72 billion total
 - Property values are 2.5x higher than the parish average.
 - Business - over \$200 million in casino investment
 - Workers – 29,563 daily workers
 - Office occupancy - 84% occupancy rate
 - Residential – 288.6 million investment, 94% CBD occupancy, 16.4% growth
 - Hospitality – 136.5 million in hotel investment since 2010, \$158.88 average daily rate, 60.1% average occupancy rate, April most popular month
 - Greenspace – 17 parks and natural areas; 53 acres of open space, 23 million in investment
 - Tourism - 660,000 monthly visitors; 22,000 daily.
 - Museums and Arts – 12 art venues, 6 museums
 - Events - 1,000+ annually (Night Market, Farmers Market, Mardi Gras), 660K visitors
 - River Center - \$125 million economic impact (Bowler's Convention)
 - Safety – Led lighting updated, DDD supported patrols, 2.4 % of BRPD calls from downtown
 - Parking – 8,089 spaces, 3828 public off-street, 3706 private off-street, 555 on-street, 11 garages
 - Marketing – 159,443 total impressions, 8.2K Facebook, 5.8 Instagram, 528 LinkedIn, 150 newsroom articles
 - The Drift Newsletter – Sent out weekly, 3,380 subscribers, 41% open rate
- **Plan Baton Rouge III Community Meeting Recap** – Casey Tate briefed the Commission on the Plan Baton Rouge III 2nd community meeting. Over 250 attended the Plan BR III open house community event on July 16, 2025, held at the Old State Capitol. There was another event for young professionals with Forum 225 at the Manship Theater. A third community meeting for public input is expedited to be held in October. The guiding principles looked at:
 - Market diversity - partnering to bring new people downtown. Southern, LSU, families.
 - Neighborhood places - to make downtown a 24/7 destination
 - New front porch - making downtown a destination spot

- Cultural corridors - Museums, cultural trails, history
- Clear connections - the riverfront, walking paths, river trail, and improved connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods

If you are interested in learning about their initial analysis and research, visit the website

www.planbatonrouge.com to view all presentations, videos, up-to-date information, and surveys. The second survey is live online, and the deadline is September 1.

- **Downtown Data Update - Placer AI** - Casey Tate briefed the Commission on downtown event data gathered using Placer AI, a program DDD has been relying on to track how many people visit downtown during specific times. Casey explained that Placer AI provides location insights and foot traffic data, which DDD uses alongside its marketing efforts. The 2025 Bowling Congress took place from March 1 to July 28, 2025. Compared to 2024, without the bowlers, there was an increase of 400,000 visits in 2025, representing a 13.13% rise. Meaning 400,000 more people visited downtown in three months. Generally, downtown experiences a summer slowdown, common in most southern cities. With schools out, we typically see about a 9% drop in visits during June, July, and August. If anyone is interested in pulling data for their business, such as traffic counts, foot traffic, and event attendance, contact the DDD office.
- **ADA Transition Update & BRT Update** - Jason Crain, MOVEBR Deputy Program Manager for the downtown enhancement projects, updated the Commission on the status of the six downtown ADA transition projects to fix the non-compliant issues.
 - Florida Street - ADA improvements were completed at the end of 2023.
 - East Boulevard – Work is complete.
 - Main Street – Under construction, all concrete work is complete at this point. The only work remaining is some pedestrian push-button improvements at the intersections, and it's just taken the contractor a little while to get that equipment delivered. Work should be completed at the end of September.
 - North Boulevard - Under construction, everything is complete except for the pedestrian push buttons.
 - Laurel/Lafayette Street – Construction has started, work includes the installation of audible pedestrian signal push buttons and crosswalk restriping. Work should be completed in the middle of October.
 - The South Boulevard Trailhead Connection connects the existing South Boulevard sidewalks over the railroad tracks to the levee trailhead and provides wayfinding signage. It's still in design, but one of the things I wanted to point out is that the railroad has done some improvements lately that have changed up the plan. The crosswalk will now be moved from the railroad over to a mid-block crossing further away from the railroad.

The Bus Rapid Transit project will be constructing several bus stations that will include bus shelters and benches. There are four along Florida Street at 5th and 7th Streets and four along 4th Street and St. Ferdinand. The contractor is Hard Rock Construction and expects work to begin towards the end of September.

Businesses and residents are being informed about the work in the area and how it might affect them. There are geofenced social media posts linked to a landing page with maps and project updates. If you are in the area, you'll receive notifications, which will direct you to more information on the

MOVEBR website about those specific projects. Additionally, updates on the downtown projects can be viewed at the MOVEBR website at movebr.brla.gov/downtownada, in addition to the MOVEBR social media posts.

- **Neighborhoodly Nights Recap** – Iboro Udoh briefed the Commission on the third Neighborhoodly Nights get-together, which was on Thursday, June 26, 2025. The latest gathering at BREC Expressway Park in South Baton Rouge was a big success. Guests enjoyed games like foosball, air hockey, and mini basketball, along with gelato and refreshments. Players from the nearby basketball courts joined in, showing how far our outreach is spreading, from the downtown core to neighborhoods like Elysian, the Capitol area, and the Hive apartments.

This time, our raffle featured curated “tours of downtown.” The family package included a Capitol Park Museum membership, a Capital City Grill gift card, and Geaux Ride passes. The evening package offered Manship Theatre tickets, a Somewhere Neighborhood Bar gift card, additional Go Ride passes, and dinner at Stroubes.

Geaux Ride was included twice to highlight its unique daytime and nighttime experiences—don’t miss the chance to try the paint-and-ride! Special thanks to our local businesses for their generous support. One of the great parts of this is that local businesses donate prizes, giving residents the chance to discover what they offer. Many are pleasantly surprised by what’s available and often become repeat customers, making it a true win-win for both businesses and the community. Our next event is coming this fall. Stay connected by subscribing to our resident newsletter; reach out to the DDD staff to get signed up.

- **River City Study** – Chris Meyer, CEO BRAf, updated the Commission. The discussion built on Plan Baton Rouge III and the opportunity to reinvest in downtown. 18 months ago, civic organizations, including the Downtown Development District, Visit Baton Rouge, and the Chamber, came together to address how Baton Rouge could better compete in attracting concerts, conventions, and major events. A key finding was that over \$1 billion in planned entertainment investments were happening in silos. The study showed how these assets, from LSU to the River Center, could work in alignment rather than in competition, positioning Baton Rouge as a top regional destination for live entertainment.

With new developments at LSU, now is the chance to reimagine the River Center as a stronger, more active community asset. Hunden Partners, now also serving as the City’s representative for the project, will help ensure coordinated planning and execution.

Mr. Meyer introduced Steve Haemmerle from Hunden to provide an update, and Mr. Haemmerle briefed the Commission. The River Center is an aging facility with outdated meeting space, no connected headquarters hotel, and limited walkable lodging options. Renovation alone will not resolve these challenges; a comprehensive redevelopment strategy is required. A recent study recommends adding a 350-room headquarters hotel, a 30,000 sq. ft. ballroom, and 40,000 sq. ft. of flexible meeting space to attract larger conferences and entertainment events. Renovating the existing center while reimagining surrounding public spaces would increase event activity, hotel room nights, and downtown vibrancy. Investments are projected to generate more than \$1 billion in economic impact, \$600 million in new earnings, and approximately 200 permanent jobs.

The redevelopment will combine public and private investment. The City will define the project scope, establish funding strategies, and issue a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to select a development partner. This phased process, spanning about 24 months, will include project definition,

market engagement, developer selection, and negotiation of agreements.

The initiative is closely coordinated with Plan Baton Rouge III to ensure alignment with the new LSU arena, riverfront connections, and downtown revitalization goals. Community input, innovative funding tools, and support for local businesses, including DBE/MBE participation, will be central to the project. The objective is to secure a partner committed to building a sustainable, long-term convention and entertainment hub for downtown.

During the discussion, Ms. Hoffman Sayal asked Chris Meyer how this initiative connects with Plan Baton Rouge III, specifically regarding riverfront access and potential incentives for amenities such as restaurants and bars. Mr. Meyer explained that the process began 18 months ago to evaluate downtown investment opportunities before incorporating Plan Baton Rouge III, ensuring alignment with community goals. Nearly \$500 million is proposed for the River Center, designed to stimulate growth in surrounding areas. The redevelopment is fully integrated into Plan Baton Rouge III through collaboration with the mayor, city council, and community partners, including BRAC, DDD, and Visit Baton Rouge. Additional measures, such as loan or incentive programs to support restaurants and small businesses, are being explored. Investments will be phased strategically to maintain downtown vitality while the River Center is offline, ultimately contributing to a comprehensive master plan for the community.

- **Beauregard Town Civil Rights Trail** – Morgan Udoh, Director of Public Arts with the Walls Project, updated the Commission on the Civil Rights Trail along the Greenway and Beauregard Town. The Downtown Development District has been instrumental in connecting this project to the Greenway Trail, creatively using beautification funds to transform utility boxes, otherwise infrastructure eyesores, into educational and tourism-focused assets.
The project highlights Baton Rouge’s civil rights history, including the local bus boycott, and lesser-known figures whose contributions shaped national civil rights efforts. Community engagement has been central; public submissions helped identify stories. A history selection committee condensed this into 13 profiles for display along North, South, and East Boulevards, with connections to Espressway Park and the State’s Civil Rights Trail.
An RFQ was issued to select artists, attracting local, national, and international submissions. The artist selection committee is narrowing candidates to five, with a public voting component planned. Each utility box design will include a digital component, allowing updates over time, and the wraps, rather than direct paint, protect the equipment and allow easy maintenance.
Community feedback is encouraged, and the DDD will host a landing page for all narratives. Schools will be invited to integrate the project into their curriculum. A public unveiling and celebration is planned for September, featuring discussions with descendants of civil rights leaders.
This is a fully community-driven initiative, with public participation shaping both the history told and the designs implemented.
- **Love Our Downtown** – Schuyler Olson briefed the Commission. The DDD launched a campaign called Love Our Downtown to celebrate and showcase support for downtown Baton Rouge. As part of the campaign, yard signs were created for residents to display on private property, buttons, window flyers for businesses or museums, and stickers for children.
The campaign emphasizes that downtown belongs to everyone, residents, workers, and visitors alike, not just those who live or work there. While supplies are limited, signs and materials are available throughout the community, and residents are encouraged to participate and show their support.
- **New Businesses:**

- Trap Haus, 1300 Government- Wellness bar with smoothie bowls, juices, and vegan soul food. Owner Terrez Collins
- Deminola Blends, 307 Third Street – Smoothies and Juices, Grand Opening Monday, August 18. Owner, Leo Sanfie

7. Events - Schuyler Olson updated the Commission:

- Ryan's Run 5K – August 23, 8:00 am, North Boulevard Town Square
- First Responders Community Event, September 6, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm, Bogan Fire Museum
- Farm Fete – September 25, 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm, Main Street Market
- Live After Five Fall Concerts – 6 Concerts beginning September 12
- St. Jude Walk – October 4, 7:00 AM, AZ Young Park
- Manship Theatre – Movies, Music & more
 - Baton Rouge Underground Film Festival
 - Sharpe Family Singers
 - Karla Bonoff
 - Manhattan Short Film Festival
 - Ruthie Foster
 - Asleep at the Wheel
 - Dumpastunk
- LSU MOA – Current Exhibits
 - FELT Summer Contemporary
 - Carved & Crafted: The Art of Letterpress, June 12 – Sept 21
- Old State Capitol –
 - Contemporary Views of the Castelatted Capitol, August 21
 - Spirits of Louisiana, Thursday, October 30
- Capitol Park Museum –
 - Billy Cannon Exhibit through January 10, 2026
- Raising Canes River Center & Theatre Fall Season:
 - An All With Affair: R & B Jam
 - Lainey Wilson: Whirlwind World Tour
 - Fantasia & Anthony Hamilton
 - Alabama Live in Concert
 - Leanne Morgan: Just Getting Started
 - Kevin Gates – The Amilio tour
- River Center Theatre for Performing Arts Broadway in Baton Rouge:
 - Addams Family – October 22
 - Hadestown – November 25
 - Mrs. Doubtfire – April 21
 - Riverdance 30 – June 22
- LASM – Shows and Events
 - Threads of Evolution: Engineering a Community That Sparkles
- Old Governor's Mansion – Fall into History, September 7, 11:00 am – 4:00 pm
- USS Kidd – Veterans Museum Open Daily from 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM
 - Strong and Calm Warrior Yoga, Saturday, September 6 from 8:00 am – 9:30 am
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – First Saturday of the month, from 8:00 am – 12:00 pm
- Red Stick Farmer's Market – Every Saturday 8:00 am – 12:00 pm

8. Commission Announcements & Updates:

Eric Dexter updated the status of Plan Baton Rouge III (PBRIII) - We extend our thanks to everyone who has participated in the community survey so far. To date, more than 2,000 surveys have been submitted, and over 500 residents have joined the first two community convenings. For those who attended both sessions, many of your ideas are now reflected in the planning maps.

The next community meeting is expected in October, with dates and location to be announced soon. Special thanks to LASM and the Old State Capitol for generously hosting the first two events.

If you haven't yet completed the community survey, we encourage you to do so—each round includes new questions. Surveys can be accessed via QR code or at planbatonrouge.com. Recordings and presentations from the convenings are also available online for anyone unable to attend in person.

We are now roughly halfway through the planning process. At the most recent meeting, key themes and ideas started to surface. The next session will focus on identifying specific projects, exploring funding strategies and models, and developing implementation approaches. Community feedback will directly influence the draft plan, which will be shared with the DDD Commission and later submitted for approval by the Metro Council and the Mayor's Office. For additional details and access to surveys, visit planbatonrouge.com

- **Patrick Michaels** acknowledged Eric Dexter, who served as the DDD chair for four years, and wanted to publicly thank him for his dedicated leadership on the board and his ongoing contributions.
- **DDD Tax Election** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated that October 11th is an important election date for renewing the property tax millage that primarily funds the Downtown Development District. This vote is by residents within the district.

9. Public Comment:

- Bridget Gaffney and Sarah Noles with Visit Baton Rouge want to share some exciting initiatives. One of them is the Museum Trail, which works like a passport, but it's all on your phone. You can sign up, explore our downtown museums and a few others outside the district, and once you complete the trail (using GPS check-ins on your phone), you earn a prize!

It's easy to use; an app is not required, just bookmark it on your phone. Please take advantage of this opportunity to enjoy all our great museums.

They have a hospitality training program that is completely free. The training is self-paced and takes about 20–30 minutes to complete. Even though the bowlers are gone, there is still football season and holiday travel. Participants gain insider knowledge, stronger community connections, and enhanced hospitality skills—all of which support tourism and its economic impact. If you've taken the course and it has had a positive impact on you, we'd love to hear from you. They hope to feature two to three people, which is a great way to showcase businesses on their social media platforms. There are handouts available in the gallery, and sign up today at the link: Champions.VisitBatonRouge.com

- Paul Groves, General Director of Opera Louisiana, and I started last September. We had a fantastic year—our last two shows at the Manship sold out in May, which was a first for us. Here's a quick overview of the upcoming season:
 - **September 28 at 3 PM:** *Over the Top* – a fun “diva competition” featuring three renowned sopranos, two of whom have performed at the Metropolitan Opera.
 - **November 23:** Lisette Oropesa, LSU alum and currently one of the world's top sopranos, joins Grammy-winning mezzo Susan Graham for a duet concert. This will be a wonderful fundraiser.
 - **December 19–21:** *Night Visitors* at the Manship.
 - **Post-Mardi Gras:** *Sing and Swing* event at the Crown Plaza.
 - **April 11:** *Madama Butterfly* at the River Center Theater, featuring Rachel Gonzalez from the Metropolitan Opera.

- Jonathan Grimes announced that the Arts Council is excited to participate in First Free Sundays. Also, on October 26th, they are bringing back “Fest For All” for a day; those who remember it know it’s a special celebration. They will be celebrating along with the Manship Theatre, Shaw Center for the Arts, LSU Museum of Art, and other venues, marking 20 years. The event will be held on October 26th from 11:00 am to 7:00 pm
 - Anna Mayes with BREADA announced she has Farm Fête invitations to pass out. The event will take place inside and outside Main Street Market, featuring two live musicians, a silent auction, and a raffle. There is a QR code inside that to can scan to purchase event or raffle tickets. Tickets are \$20 each and enter you for a “Date Night Per Year” prize—valued at \$1,800—redeemable at local restaurants like Cocha, Beausoleil, and others.
 - Charles Daniel, owner of Geaux Ride, announced that they have been downtown since 2016, promoting health and wellness by encouraging people to bike. They are planning a 9-year celebration on September 27th, with about 200–300 people biking through the streets downtown. They’ll offer free bikes, family-friendly activities, support local vendors and food trucks, and aim to keep downtown lively. Everyone here is working hard to support downtown, and they are excited to contribute at the grassroots level. Thank you!
9. **Meeting adjourned** – Joshua Hollins moved to adjourn the meeting, Gary Jupiter seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.