

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

February 10, 2026

The Queen Casino, 1717 River Park Boulevard

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

Absentees: Philip Jordan–Treasurer

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Rannah Gray, Kenneth Grant, Angela deGravelles, Jordan Arceneaux, Aimee Conerly, Steve Legendre, Tom Tanner, Alysia Guin, Ianne Salvosa, Kennadi Wells, Jason Crain, Mary Durusau, Hope Robinson, Bruce Woods, Anna Mayes, Chris Wright, Na’Tisha Natt, Brittany Marshall, M.G. Bailey, Jamie Setze, Thomasena Joseph, Yolandre McCray-Moore, Chef Celeste Gill, Samantha Morgan, Lauren L Tompkins, Anthony Kimball, Nathaniel Tannehill, Chris Toombs.

Patrick Michaels called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting and thanked our host and breakfast sponsor, the Queen Casino, and Daniel Hutchinson, Director of Bally’s Baton Rouge. Mr. Hutchison welcomed everyone and noted that Bally’s Casino, which opened on December 6, 2025, as part of a combined \$250 million investment by Bally’s and the Queen, positions the two casinos as “bookends” to downtown.

Mr. Hutchinson spoke about the importance of collaboration among downtown stakeholders, highlighting opportunities to connect nearby businesses and attractions—such as restaurants, bars, entertainment venues, the Science Museum, State Capitol, and local events to create a cohesive destination experience. He stressed that downtown’s strength lies in offering a variety of activities within close proximity, encouraging longer visitor stays.

He also highlighted the role of hospitality in community engagement, including partnerships with local organizations such as St. Vincent de Paul and the Bridge Center for Hope. With nearly 1,000 employees across both properties, there is a strong focus on service, community involvement, and contributing positively to Downtown Baton Rouge.

Whitney expressed appreciation for the investments and their positive impact on downtown, noting that both casinos are important assets.

1. Board Action:

- **2026 Carryforward Funds:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal presented proposals for year-end carryforward funds, explaining that unused funds are reviewed annually in coordination with the Planning and Projects Work Group and aligned with the organization’s strategic plan. The proposed allocations for approximately \$85,000 in carry-forward funds include:
 - A DDD rebrand initiative, as identified in the strategic plan
 - Marketing campaigns focused on addressing misconceptions and improving perceptions of downtown

- Ongoing beautification efforts, including enhancements such as the Rotary Sculpture, holiday décor, art installations, and other public realm improvements
- Support for neighborhood events within historic districts
- Potential installation of additional security cameras.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated these initiatives are consistent with strategic priorities and ongoing efforts to enhance downtown’s image, safety, and community engagement. Gary Jupiter made a motion to approve the proposed use of carry-forward funds, Susan Tuner seconded, and the motion was approved.

- **2026 DDD Commission Officers:** Patrick Michaels made a motion to approve the 2026 slate of officers:
 - Patrick Michaels - Chairman
 - Philip Jordan - Vice Chairman
 - Joshua Hollis – Treasurer
 - Gary Black – Secretary

Susan Turner seconded the motion, and the motion was approved.

2. Susan Turner made a motion to approve the agenda. Eric Dexter seconded, and the motion was approved.

3. Gary Black made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 9, 2025, meeting. Susan Turner seconded, and the motion was approved.

4. **Governmental Issues:**

- **River Center Oversight Committee Update** – Whitney Hoffman updated the Commission and announced the next River Center Oversight Committee meeting will be held on March 11 at the River Center and noted these meetings are open to the public. An update was also provided on the Economic Development District (EDD), which was formed last year. An item on the February 11 Metro Council agenda would authorize the City-Parish to collect a tax, if approved by the EDD board. Any proposed tax would also require Metro Council approval, as they serve as the EDD board. The tax structure could include up to a 2% sales tax and a 2% hotel/motel tax.
- **Historic Preservation Commission:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the Historic Preservation Commission items impacting downtown.
 - HPC 20-25 – 719 Bungalow Lane, Driveway addition – Approved
 - 764 Spanish Town Road - Demolition by neglect – 3-11-26
 - 631 Lakeland Drive – Demolition by neglect- 3-11-26
 - 645 North 8th Street – Demolition by neglect – 3-11-26
- **DDD Commissioner Reappointment** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the reappointment in January of Gary Jupiter to the DDD Commission.
- **DDD Tax** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission. Since the December meeting, two key items have been addressed regarding the DDD tax:
 - **2026 Tax Collection:** Approval was granted to levy the DDD tax at a rate of 9.5 mills for the 2026 tax year.
 - **Election Certification:** Results of the October election were certified, which authorizes the continuation of the DDD tax for an additional five years.
- **City Dock Management** - Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. At the Metro Council meeting on Wednesday, December 10th, an item for the City Dock, for a public-private partnership with American Cruise Lines, was approved. An agreement has been established between the City-Parish and

the American Queen as part of a public-private partnership. Under this agreement, the City Parish and the American Queen have outlined responsibilities for the management and maintenance of the dock. The partnership aims to attract additional cruise ships and increase visitor traffic to the area.

- **Planning & Zoning Commission** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission on a few proposed road revocations around the Bally’s Casino. The affected areas include roads running beneath the atrium, portions of France Street, and Europe Street. The item was deferred to the February 23rd Planning & Zoning Commission meeting. Additional details and mapping of the affected areas will be available for review at that meeting.

5. Development Initiatives:

- **Civil Rights Trail Unveiling** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced a Black History initiative featuring artistic utility boxes designed by a local artist. The unveiling is scheduled during Black History Month on February 20th at 9:00 a.m. in Town Square and will be a half-day program focused on community engagement and education. This effort is a collaboration with The Walls Project and Envision NBR, with a joint unveiling that connects the local installations to Envision NBR’s Legacy Trail near Capitol High. The event will include tours of the downtown art installations, followed by transportation via bus or bike to additional sites in North Baton Rouge. The initiative is intended to educate everyone about local Black history and civil rights contributions, while positioning Baton Rouge as an important part of the civil rights movement. The public is invited to attend and take part in the event.
- **ANHA Riverfront Signage** – Iboro Udoh updated the Commission on the unveiling of the ANHA Riverfront signage funded by an 50/50 grant from the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area. An unveiling event is scheduled for March 3rd at 8:30 a.m. at the Water Campus, where attendees will have the opportunity to view detailed informational panels. The signs are intended to emphasize the significance of the Mississippi River to both Baton Rouge and the vitality of the downtown area, showcasing its historical and present-day impact. The signs have been installed at key locations, including Skip Bertman Drive, the City Dock, the intersection of Florida Street and River Road near the Rotary sign, and the Water Campus. The signage's design incorporates a cutout representing the Mississippi River, marking Baton Rouge’s location along it, and features a patina finish intended to weather naturally over time for aesthetic effect.
- **Wayfinding Signage Restoration** - Iboro Udoh provided updates on wayfinding signage improvements throughout downtown. Through a partnership with the City-Parish and with ARPA funding, new vehicular and historic signs are being installed to replace older, weathered versions. Ten of the forty downtown vehicular signs are being addressed in this phase, along with historic signage in areas such as Beauregard Town and Spanish Town. Key locations for new signage include areas near Laurel Street and River Road, as well as near the LASM and USS Kidd. Future phases will include updates to pedestrian signage and the remaining vehicular wayfinding signs as funding becomes available.
- **CPRC Regional Plan Survey** – Jamie Setze, Executive Director of the Capital Region Planning Commission, briefed the Commission. Mr. Setze provided an overview of the Move 2050 Plan, a 25-year long-range transportation plan serving an 11-parish region, focusing on the Baton Rouge area. This plan will analyze transportation needs, identify potential solutions, and recommend projects to support the mobility of all road users. The plan is currently in the update phase, identifying the community’s transportation needs through the mid-century.

A public survey has been underway for approximately one month and will remain open through the end of the week. Stakeholders and residents are encouraged to participate, as the feedback will help identify key concerns, challenges, and priorities related to daily commuting, accessibility, and overall

transportation infrastructure. Input gathered will directly inform the development of the plan.

The Move 2050 Plan is essential for meeting federal requirements tied to transportation funding, which supports improvements to roads, bridges, transit systems, trails, and sidewalks. Baton Rouge is currently classified as a non-attainment area under the Clean Air Act, making it especially important to develop a comprehensive, community-informed plan to improve air quality and ensure compliance with federal standards. The public was encouraged to take the survey to ensure the plan reflects local needs and concerns.

- **MOVEBR Updates** – Jason Crain, MOVEBR Deputy Program Manager for the downtown enhancement projects, updated the Commission on the status of the six downtown ADA transition projects. The six ADA transition projects have been deemed substantially complete, with only minor punch list items remaining on the Main Street project, which are expected to be finalized by the end of the week. The South Boulevard Trailhead Connection Project, which will link existing sidewalks across the railroad to the Mississippi River levee trail, is nearing completion in the design phase. Progress has been delayed due to a pending railroad review, though minimal feedback is anticipated. Once received, the project is expected to move quickly into construction. Mr. Crain also gave updates on the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. Construction is currently underway along Nicholson Drive, where lane closures are in place as crews build 10 stations (five in each direction) between LSU and downtown. This phase is expected to be completed within two to three weeks, after which construction will shift into the downtown area, likely beginning in late February or early March. The BRT stations will include level boarding platforms, shelters, benches, bicycle accommodations, ADA-compliant ramps, and real-time bus arrival signage. A rapid response contact number and website are available to address any concerns from residents or businesses during construction disruptions.
- **Hotel Lincoln Update** – Anthony Kimble provided an update to the Commission on the redevelopment of the Lincoln Hotel. The project will convert the historic property into 12 affordable apartment units and two commercial spaces. Construction began in November but recently encountered delays due to unforeseen structural issues. As demolition progressed, significant deterioration was discovered behind the plaster walls, including rot and oxidation in the underlying materials, as well as more extensive window damage than originally anticipated. The project team has re-engaged structural engineers to develop updated plans addressing issues such as compromised stair structures and overall building integrity. Amendments are also being coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office to approve changes related to wall reconstruction and window replacements, ensuring compliance with historic preservation requirements. An additional challenge arose when the subcontractor responsible for refurbishing the building's historic 1955 elevator was acquired by another company. The project team is currently working to confirm that the new company will honor the original scope of refurbishing the elevator. Mr. Kimble stated such challenges are common in historic renovations, and he will return to provide further progress updates in the coming months.
- **Spanish Town Condominiums** - Greg Bailey with the Spanish Town Civic Association provided an update on the Spanish Town Condominiums project. Construction is underway on the first phase, consisting of approximately eight units. The development, which began planning around 2021, is located on Lakeland Drive near the lake and features a mix of two and three-story structures. The project is expected to have a transformative impact on the Spanish Town neighborhood, offering scenic views and new residential opportunities. Future phases are planned, with additional development to proceed as initial units are sold. A portion of the broader development near Capitol Lakes remains on hold due to environmental

oversight related to an EPA Superfund site.

Mr. Bailey highlighted ongoing and upcoming activity within Spanish Town. Preparations are underway for the annual Spanish Town Parade, and a sidewalk rehabilitation project is moving forward with support from the City-Parish to address aging infrastructure in the historic neighborhood. The Louisiana Hospital Association has received approval from the Historic Preservation Commission to construct a new headquarters on Lakeland Drive. Efforts are also being made by local organizations to address properties suffering from demolition by neglect, to encourage rehabilitation or sale to preserve and revitalize historic homes in the area.

- **PlacerAi** – Casey Tate briefed the Commission on downtown event data gathered using Placer Ai, a program DDD has been utilizing to track how many people visit downtown during specific times. Casey explained that PlacerAi provides location insights and foot traffic data, which DDD uses alongside its marketing efforts. Mr. Tate highlighted recent efforts to compile and share information supporting commercial development in the area. In response to the IDA value report, a retail study, and a retail survey, the office has created a “real estate card” for realtors that consolidates research data and presents it in an accessible format. This resource is designed to educate realtors about downtown Baton Rouge and position the office as a key resource for promoting downtown properties.

The real estate card includes information on available support from the Downtown Development District (DDD), such as site-specific guidance, parking assistance, marketing support, and access to PlacerAi data, which provides insights on foot traffic, demographics, dwell times, and peak activity periods. The card also highlights statistics drawn from PlacerAi and identifies commercial opportunities based on surveys and realtor feedback. The resource was well-received during a presentation to the Greater Baton Rouge Realtor Association, and the office plans to distribute it widely to commercial realtors and brokerages to encourage new business and potential vendors downtown.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated that at the realtors' meeting, it was emphasized that downtown Baton Rouge is has evolved beyond just a place to work, due to investments in hotels, residential developments, and other infrastructure. The area is no longer primarily a daytime restaurant district but now attracts both evening visitors and residents returning from work, creating new opportunities for businesses.

- **Business Safety & De-Escalation Training** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission regarding a business safety and de-escalation training, part of a recommendation from the five-year strategic plan. The training, in partnership with BRPD, is scheduled for February 24th at 5:00 p.m. and is open to all business owners, managers, and employees. The session will cover best practices for handling challenging situations, including de-escalation techniques, tips for managing incidents, and guidance on when to involve law enforcement. Additional sessions may be scheduled in the future, depending on interest. Attendees are encouraged to share this opportunity.
- **New Businesses:**
 - **Pedego Electric Bikes** – 602 Main Street
 - **Mahjong House** – 747 St. Charles Street
 - **City Roots & Les Amis Bake Shoppe** – Coming soon – II City Plaza

6. **Events** - Schuyler Olson updated the Commission and provided an overview of upcoming events, highlighting a variety of programming over the next several weeks. This week includes a Galentine’s “Girl Dinner” at the River Terrace at the Shaw Center featuring local vendors. The Spanish Town Parade took place this past weekend, and the Krewe of Mutts Parade is scheduled for the following Sunday at 12:00 p.m. on North Boulevard.

Additional festivals and events planned for the spring season include the Mardi Gras Fest returning to downtown, the Three Strands Wine Festival, Holi Fest, the Red Beans and Rice Festival, and the Buddy Walk on March 21st. New offerings include the Southern Palette food experience at the LSU Museum of Art, the YMCA Annual Corporate Cup Run on March 28th, the Arts Council's annual fundraiser, MPAC on March 8th. The Neighborly Nights event is scheduled for March 17th with a St. Patrick's Day theme, though the location is yet to be confirmed.

Regular programming continues at venues throughout downtown, including theater performances at Manship Theater, comedy shows, and movie series. Ongoing exhibitions at the LSU Museum of Art and Capitol Park Museum, Black History Month programming at the Old State Capitol, and painting events celebrating Spanish Town. Seasonal and recreational offerings include Zydeco hockey and other shows at Raising Cane's River Center, Art After Hours at LASM, Strong Calm Warrior Yoga at USS Kidd, the Arts Market, and the Red Stick Farmers Market. The Main Street Market continues to operate on Saturdays from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Full event details are available on the DDD website.

7. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- **Plan Baton Rouge III Update** – Eric Dexter provided an update on the PBR3 planning process. Plan Baton Rouge 3 is now in the final stages of the planning process. The first draft of the master plan was received toward the end of 2025 and has been under review for the past month, with recommended revisions and feedback incorporated from project partners. The draft, totaling approximately 136 pages, has been carefully analyzed to identify key recommendations and assign responsible parties for implementation. The draft plan is currently being circulated among project partners for additional feedback over the next three to four weeks. Following this review, a final master plan will be prepared and presented to the Downtown Development District (DDD), with a brief overview and online posting for broader access. Subsequent steps include presenting the plan to the Planning Commission and Metro Council for endorsement, approval, and recommendation. The planning process has included extensive public engagement, with approximately 5,000 points of interaction through open houses, focus groups, and over 3,000 survey responses. This engagement reflects strong community interest in enhancing downtown Baton Rouge. The plan aims to guide future development and investment, with the potential to bring significant economic growth and over a billion dollars in investment to the downtown area over the coming years.
- **Main Street Market Grand Opening:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal provided an update. The Main Street Market recently reopened following a week-long series of events, featuring upgraded facilities, new vendors, improved bathrooms, and the removal of old metal cages. The market operates Monday through Saturday from 7:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., and attendees were encouraged to support the vendors.
- **Capital Area United Way Renovations (CAUW Dedication)** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. Renovations to the Capital Area United Way building have been completed, preserving its historic Art Deco architecture. The building recently celebrated its restoration, marking a positive milestone for downtown historic preservation.
- **Hilton Acquisition** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission. The Capitol Hilton Hotel has undergone a change in ownership, though operations and services are expected to remain the same. These updates underscore continued investment and interest in downtown, particularly in the hospitality sector, as occupancy rates remain high.

8. Public Comment:

- Mary Durusau, Director of the Old State Capitol, announced that the Louisiana Old State Capitol recently

opened a new permanent exhibit titled *“A More Perfect Union: Reconstruction Legacy in Louisiana.”* The exhibit explores Louisiana’s role as a model during Reconstruction, highlighting the biracial legislature, the constitution promoting education for Black and White children, and the enfranchisement of Black men. It also examines the impact of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination on these efforts and the broader contributions of Black leadership during the Reconstruction era, including foundational concepts such as birthright citizenship.

The exhibit emphasizes that many questions raised during Reconstruction, such as voting rights and the balance of state and federal power, remain relevant today. Attendees are encouraged to visit the exhibit and to share it with churches, school groups, and friends. As a permanent installation, it will remain on display indefinitely.

- Thomasena Joseph with Clean Green Neighborhood Alliance announced that Earth Day will return to downtown Baton Rouge on April 11th, taking place in Rhorer Plaza, building on the success of last year’s event.
- Yolandre McCray Moore announced that the YMCA Corporate Cup is a 5K run/walk with a new route this year. It will be held Downtown Baton Rouge across from the Raising Cane’s River Center on S. River Road. Businesses and corporations are encouraged to participate as groups in upcoming events, highlighting the benefits of community engagement and the scenic views available at downtown venues. A reminder was given about 24-hour access at the YMCA, which is helpful for members with busy schedules.

9. Meeting adjourned – Patrick Michaels moved to adjourn the meeting, Joshua Hollis seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.