

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

June 9, 2026

Main Street Market, 501 Main Street

Board Members in Attendance: Patrick Michaels - Chairman, Gary Black – Secretary, Eric Dexter, and Gary Jupiter

Absentees: Philip Jordan–Vice Chairman, Joshua Hollins–Treasurer, and Susan Turner,

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Amanda Santos, Elizabeth Dent Sumrall, Nicole Kimball, Chuck Booksh, Jasmine Thomas, Joseph H Lamendola, Anny Mayes, John Jackson, Mysti Byrnes, Darlene Adams Rowland, Lisa Gray, Candace Wright, Yolandre McCray Moore, Frederick Sargent, Jordan Arceneaux, Kevin Broussard, Colleen Rials, Ted Devall, Ianne Salvosa, Aloria Scott, Samantha Morgan, Melanie Cohen, Jennae Biddiscombe, Sarah Gardner, Lisa Gray, Tracey Barhorst, Sage Foley, Matthew Destouet, Luke St. John McKnight, Willie Parmes, Sinella Aghasi, Jonathan Grimes, Sarah Schnauder, Charles Daniel.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting. It was noted that a quorum had not yet been reached, with the Commission one member short. The meeting would proceed with introductory items and return to approval of the minutes once additional members arrived and a quorum was established.

Whitney thanked BREADA's Main Street Market and River & Roots Coffee for hosting and sponsoring the breakfast. Darlene Rowland, Executive Director of BREADA, provided an overview of BREADA and Main Street Market, noting that BREADA will celebrate its 30th anniversary in November and Main Street Market is approaching 25 years of operation. She explained that the market was developed in response to recommendations in Plan Baton Rouge I, with the Red Stick Farmers Market relocating to the site in 2002. Following a major renovation, Main Street Market reopened in December 2025.

Ms. Rowland highlighted current vendors, including Creole Creations, Vivian's Rotisserie & Grill, Sapor, and The Cozy Griddle, and discussed the launch of River & Roots Market & Café, which provides downtown residents and workers with access to locally sourced produce and serves Counter Culture Coffee, selected for its commitment to sustainable sourcing and long-term partnerships with coffee growers. She added that River & Roots is one of only two locations in Louisiana serving the brand. She also announced new programming in the renovated teaching kitchen, including sake pairing dinners, wine and produce pairing events, and additional culinary education programs. Attendees were encouraged to visit the Red Stick Farmers Market during the peak summer season, and Ms. Rowland noted that the breakfast items served at the meeting were sourced from local market vendors. Ms. Rowland encouraged attendees to visit the Red Stick Farmers Market during its peak summer season and noted that products served at the event, including fruit and pastries, were sourced from local vendors. Attendees were also informed of complimentary two-hour parking validation available through the adjacent parking garage.

1. Patrick Michaels called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Eric Dexter made a motion to approve the agenda. Gary Jupiter seconded, and the motion was approved.

3. Gary Jupiter made a motion to approve the minutes from the May 12, 2026, meeting. Gary Black seconded, and the motion was approved.

4. Governmental Issues:

- **Plan Baton Rouge III** – Whitney Hoffman updated the Commission on the status of Plan Baton Rouge III. Following the Downtown Development District's special meeting on May 12, the plan was presented to the Planning Commission, which approved it on May 18. The next step in the process is consideration by the Metro Council at its zoning meeting scheduled for June 17 at 4:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers. Members of the public were encouraged to attend and participate in the presentation and discussion of the plan.
- **Historic Preservation Commission:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the Historic Preservation Commission items impacting downtown. Several properties previously identified for demolition by neglect were discussed. It was noted that the purpose of the demolition-by-neglect process is to encourage preservation and restoration efforts before demolition becomes necessary. The Commission reported that all affected property owners have been contacted and are working collaboratively to address needed repairs and restoration.
Additional items under review included balcony railing improvements on 8th Street and a door replacement request on Spanish Town Road. A demolition request for properties located at 438 and 442 Main Street was also discussed. Consideration of that request has been deferred and is expected to be heard at the Commission's next meeting in July, as no meeting is scheduled for June. The Historic Preservation Commission meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 8:30 a.m. at the Planning Commission.
 - Spanish Town Road - Demolition by neglect
 - 631 Lakeland Drive – Demolition by neglect
 - 645 North 8th Street – Demolition by neglect
 - HPC-3-26 645 N 8th Street – Balcony railings
 - HPC- 4-26, 764 Spanish Town Road – Door replacement
 - HPC-2-26, 438 & 442 Main Street, Demolition by neglect – Deferral
- **House Bill 213** - Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission regarding efforts to align the DDD's bylaws with its governing legislation as part of the strategic planning process. The initiative includes reviewing and updating provisions to ensure consistency between the bylaws and enabling legislation. It was reported that House Bill 213, sponsored by Terry Landry and serving as the organization's governing legislation, has successfully advanced through the legislative process and was sent to the Governor for executive approval.

5. Development Initiatives:

- **Downtown Advocacy** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on participation in the International Downtown Association (IDA) Downtown Advocacy Event in Washington, D.C., in April. Whitney attended the annual event alongside the Director of the Downtown Development District of New Orleans and met with members of Louisiana's congressional delegation, including Bill Cassidy, John Kennedy, and Cleo Fields.
The delegation advocated for federal support of downtown revitalization initiatives, including the Revitalizing Downtowns Act, homelessness assistance programs, Continuum of Care funding, and grant

opportunities to support downtown development efforts.

- **River Road Bike-Pedestrian Trail** – Iboro Udoh, Development Project Director, updated the Commission on the River Road Bike-Pedestrian Trail project, a grant-funded initiative supported through the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). Construction is currently underway, with Alfaro Bros. serving as the contractor. Following a kickoff meeting held the previous month, work has progressed quickly toward completion.

The trail extends from the southern entrance of The Queen northward to The Hive, creating a new multimodal connection for residents in the northern downtown area. The path is designed to accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and wheelchair users, providing improved access between residential developments, downtown destinations, and the levee trail system. Project completion is anticipated by the end of the month or early the following month.

- **River Road Multi-Use Paths** – Iboro Udoh updated the Commission on the second River Road trail project, which will extend from the area behind the Hilton to Main Street along the east side of River Road. The project is intended to improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between downtown hotels, parking facilities, and key downtown destinations.

While construction has not yet begun, a kickoff meeting has been completed, and work is expected to begin in June. Iboro explained that the project will close an existing gap in the downtown trail network, complementing the recently completed northern connection between The Hive, nearby condominiums, and the levee trail system.

The project will also improve accessibility along River Road by eliminating a section of stairs that currently interrupts the sidewalk. The new design will provide a continuous, accessible pathway with a smooth transition for pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair users, and other mobility device users. This enhancement will create a more connected and accessible route throughout the downtown area.

- **Downtown to North BR Bike-Ped Improvements** - Iboro Udoh reported on a partnership with BREC to improve pedestrian and bicycle connections between North Baton Rouge and downtown. The DDD is pursuing funding for a dedicated connection from downtown to the Freedom Heritage Trail following recent roadway improvements on Spanish Town Road. The project would connect downtown to the six-mile Freedom Heritage Trail and Scotlandville Parkway, creating a continuous north-south multimodal corridor when combined with existing Greenway infrastructure. Iboro also highlighted the recent Freedom Heritage Trail ribbon-cutting and its significance in commemorating Southern University student marches and the nearby Memorial Park site associated with the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal added that the Downtown Greenway forms the backbone of a growing citywide network and noted that the Riverfront connection project currently under construction will link northern riverfront residences directly to the Greenway and the Mississippi River Levee Trail, expanding pedestrian access to the riverfront.

- **Downtown Tree Plantings** – Sage Foley, Executive Director of Baton Rouge Green, provided an update on a partnership between Baton Rouge Green, the City-Parish, and the Downtown Development District to expand the downtown tree canopy. As part of the project, Baton Rouge Green conducted a new inventory of downtown trees and identified approximately 148 vacant tree wells out of 5,000.

Using funding targeted for urban forestry and Formosan termite mitigation, the partners combined resources to plant 100 new trees throughout downtown. Initial contributions of \$25,000 each were provided by Baton Rouge Green, the City-Parish, and the DDD, with additional funding secured through a state appropriation championed by Franklin Foil, bringing the total project investment to approximately \$150,000.

Ms. Foley noted that planting and maintaining a tree through its first year costs approximately \$1,500 and includes site preparation, installation, watering, and ongoing care. The project also focused on increasing species diversity to strengthen the long-term health and resilience of the urban canopy. Planting has been completed, and Baton Rouge Green is now focused on maintenance and monitoring to ensure the trees successfully establish and thrive.

Casey Tate expressed his appreciation to Baton Rouge Green and all project partners for their collaboration, describing the initiative as an example of the strong partnerships that make downtown improvements possible. He noted that the original goal of planting 15 trees grew into the installation of approximately 100 trees, resulting in a significant enhancement to the downtown landscape. Casey thanked Baton Rouge Green, Senator Franklin Foil, the State of Louisiana, and the City of Baton Rouge for their commitment and contributions to the project.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated that planting trees in the downtown environment is significantly more complex than simply planting in open ground due to underground utilities and other infrastructure constraints; she commended them for successfully navigating these challenges. Whitney mentioned businesses interested in planting trees within the public right-of-way may do so through a permitting process and encouraged interested parties to contact the DDD office for assistance with permitting requirements, tree selection, and project coordination.

- **Louisiana Hospital Association** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal provided an update on the construction of the Louisiana Hospital Association in Spanish Town. The Commission viewed a rendering of the new facility. Construction has begun on the new Louisiana Hospital Association facility following the demolition of a previous building on the site, located near the State Capitol. Whitney stated that several professional associations are located in the Central Business District and Spanish Town because of their proximity to the Capitol.
- **Harvest Commons Charter School** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal introduced Sarah Schneider, CEO of Harvest Commons School, who provided an update on the school's August 2026 opening and the renovation of the historic South Boulevard School campus. Ms. Schneider highlighted the preservation of the 1949 building, which has served as a school since 1907 and was one of Baton Rouge's first successfully integrated schools. The project includes renovated classrooms and outdoor agricultural learning spaces, with the school opening for up to 150 students and eventually serving 424 students in grades K–5 through a project-based, agriculture-focused curriculum. She also announced that construction is expected to be completed by July 21, followed by a community open house in partnership with the Beauregard Civic Association. Ms. Schneider introduced Principal Candace Wright, and questions were invited following the meeting.
- **Interstate 10 Widening Project** – Casey Tate provided an update on the ongoing I-10 widening project, noting that the I-10 westbound flyover is closed on weekends from 10:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. as construction continues. While access to downtown remains open, motorists traveling to the I-10 bridge should expect detours. Casey encouraged the public to follow the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development's social media channels for construction updates and traffic advisories.
- **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.

- **PlacerAi** – Casey Tate presented a Placer.ai update highlighting downtown visitation trends based on anonymized mobile device data. During the three-month legislative session, the Capitol Park area recorded approximately 315,000 visits, an increase of nearly 70,000 visitors, reflecting the positive economic impact of legislators and visitors on downtown hotels, restaurants, and short-term rentals. Casey shared data from the May 30 Night Market, which attracted approximately 15,000 attendees—an increase of 2,500 visitors from the previous event, with attendees remaining for an average of more than two hours. Demographic data revealed the event drew young professionals, young families, and suburban households from across Louisiana, the Gulf Coast, and as far away as Dallas and Shreveport.
- **New Businesses** – Casey Tate welcomed the return of House Brew Coffee to downtown, announcing its expanded location in the state parking garage at 278 North Street, where it will offer specialty coffee and a new social gathering space. They plan to open at the end of July.

6. Events - Schuyler Olson updated the Commission and provided an overview of upcoming downtown events and cultural programming:

- Highlights included the Lazaro & Davis Jazz Mini Series at the library on Sundays in June, the annual Pride Festival at the Raising Cane's River Center featuring David Archuleta, the America 250 Celebration Concert at Repentance Park with performances by Amanda Shaw, Rockin' Dopsie, John Schneider, and Wayne Touns, and WBRZ's Fireworks on the Mississippi celebration on July 4. Schuyler also noted the upcoming Flag Day Celebration on June 14, hosted by Senator Regina Barrow, and the annual Happy's 5000 and Beer Mile Run.
- Schuyler highlighted ongoing arts and cultural offerings, including performances, workshops, and the return of the Underground Film Festival at Manship Theatre; current exhibitions at the LSU Museum of Art, Capitol Park Museum, and the Old State Capitol; performances at the Raising Cane's River Center, featuring Jerry Seinfeld and Riverdance; LASM planetarium programs; the USS Kidd Veterans Museum's monthly Strong & Calm Warrior Yoga program; and the weekly Baton Rouge Arts Market and Red Stick Farmers Market at the Main Street Market.

7. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- **Lincoln Theatre Signage** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission on the Lincoln Theatre restoration, noting that the historic theater sign has been reinstalled and marks a significant milestone in the ongoing renovation project. Whitney expressed her excitement about the progress and said additional construction updates will be provided as work continues on the facility.
- **IDA Research Committee/Board of Directors** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal shared highlights from her service on the International Downtown Association (IDA) Board of Directors and as Chair of the Research Committee. She presented national Placer.ai data showing that downtown office activity has recovered to about 80% of pre-pandemic levels, visitation to 94%, and that 85% of downtowns have experienced residential growth. She noted these trends align with the goals of Plan Baton Rouge III, particularly expanding downtown housing and mixed-use development. Whitney also shared takeaways from the IDA Place Matters Conference, emphasizing the similarities between Madison and Baton Rouge and the importance of improving connections between downtown and LSU through initiatives such as Bus Rapid Transit.
- **Emergent Method Ribbon Cutting** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated that Emergent Method held its ribbon-cutting ceremony in April, marking an exciting milestone as the company continues to grow while remaining in Downtown Baton Rouge.
- **Bally's Art Reveal:** Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced that Bally's Casino held an art reveal celebrating

the completion of a painting created by artist Jacob Zumo during the venue's grand opening. The event unveiled the finished artwork, and commemorative prints were distributed to attendees.

- **River Center Hockey** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal reported that a professional hockey team will remain at the River Center following a period of uncertainty about the team's future. The continuation of hockey is viewed as an important economic driver for downtown businesses and restaurants, and additional announcements regarding the team, including its name and branding, are expected in the future.
- **Sports Illustrated Resorts** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal announced that the Hilton has new ownership and will continue to provide updates as plans related to the Sports Illustrated concept develop. In the meantime, hotel operations remain unchanged, and the public is encouraged to continue booking weddings, conferences, and other events as usual.
- **Desiderata Community Welcome/Ribbon Cutting**: Chef Ciara Finley, owner of Desiderata Kitchen, will hold a Community Welcome and Ribbon Cutting ceremony on June 18 from 11:00 am – 2:00 pm at 431 N. 3rd Street.

8. Public Comment:

- Chris Toombs of the Mayor's Office, representing the Department of Human Development Services (DHDS) and the Office of Community Development (OCD), shared updates on parish initiatives related to mental health and homelessness. On behalf of Dr. Leah Collins, Chief Health Officer, he encouraged the community to utilize the Parish's Mental Health Alliance for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. He also asked businesses to contact the Mayor's Office when assistance is needed for individuals experiencing homelessness so outreach teams can connect them with available resources. Mr. Toombs thanked the DDD for its partnership with the Mayor's Office and noted that the organizations are working together on several initiatives, including a future sports-related project aimed at increasing activity and investment in downtown.

9. Meeting adjourned – Gary Jupiter moved to adjourn the meeting; Gary Black seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.