

SPECIAL DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

PLAN BATON ROUGE III – MASTER PLAN PRESENTATION

May 12, 2026

Baton Rouge Area Foundation, 451 Florida Street, Suite LL 100

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

Absentees: Philip Jordan–Vice Chairman

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Anne Mahoney, Mark Martin, Dr. Joe Lamendola, Steve Legendre, Kayla Whitney, Karen Soniat, Clerk Gernon, Nathan McBride, Jasmine Thomas, Myles Brumfield, Debra Hudson, Deborah Todd, Brian Goad, Adrienne Kors Horn, Mary Durusau, J.R. Ball, Joe Martin, Jennifer Winstead, Beaux Jones, Rex Cabaniss, Claude Reynaud, Judy Foust, Derrell Cohoon, Anne Broderick, Jennifer Baker, Virgil Smothers, Vishal Vasanji, Brandon Songy, Angela deGravelle, Tom Tanner, David Oliveaux, Gregg Bailey, Greg Williams, Elizabeth Dent Sumrall, Parks Stephenson, Kelly Bienn, Drake Boudreaux, Boo Thomas, Javier Gallegos, Ianne Salvosa, Jennae Biddiscombe, Solomon Ona, Gus Levy, Alysia Guin, Christian Melton, Laura Cating, Jill Kidder, Francis Dinh

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 Baton Rouge Area Foundation.

Baton Rouge Area Foundation President and CEO Chris Meyer welcomed everyone to the meeting and acknowledged Eric Dexter for his leadership in city initiatives and service on the DDD commission. He stated that over the past year, community organizations and local leaders, within East Baton Rouge Parish, along with thousands of residents, collaborated to develop Plan Baton Rouge III (PBR III), a long-range vision for downtown reinvestment and revitalization over the next 10 to 15 years. The plan builds upon decades of downtown planning efforts and follows approximately 15 years after Plan Baton Rouge II. He emphasized that the initiative represents a collective community effort and that the unveiling marks the beginning of the implementation phase. He thanked the DDD for its partnership and expressed appreciation to all community members who helped shape the plan.

- 1. Board Action:**
- Gary Black made a motion to approve the agenda. Susan Turner seconded, and the motion was approved.
- Eric Dexter made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 10, 2026, meeting. Joshua Hollins seconded, and the motion was approved.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal reiterated that the event marked the unveiling of the final vision for Plan Baton Rouge III, developed through extensive community meetings, surveys, and public participation. Whitney

expressed appreciation to community members and stakeholders for their continued support, noting that the plan is ambitious yet achievable, given the success of prior downtown initiatives. She noted the plan's foundation furthers earlier planning efforts and recognized the contributions of past community leaders involved in PBR I and II. She noted that Downtown Baton Rouge has undergone significant transformation over the years, including growth from no hotel rooms in 2000 to approximately 1,200 today, along with the addition of green spaces and other enhancements. Whitney expressed her appreciation to all the partners, the community, and the Board, specifically Patrick Michaels and Susan Turner, for their involvement in the planning and project work group. Whitney invited Eric Dexter to provide remarks.

Eric Dexter stated that Plan Baton Rouge III resulted from more than a year of planning involving civic leaders, community stakeholders, and extensive public input. He referenced a 2022 leadership trip to Greenville, where local leaders observed downtown redevelopment and riverfront activation initiatives. Mr. Dexter explained that these discussions underscored the importance of Baton Rouge's riverfront as a major, underutilized asset with the potential to better connect residents and visitors to the Mississippi River.

Following that effort, a downtown stakeholder task force identified the need for a new downtown master plan. In 2024, a Request for Proposals was issued, and Sasaki was selected to lead the planning process from among more than 23 submissions received nationwide. Mr. Dexter thanked community members for their participation throughout the process.

- 4. Initiatives - Plan Baton Rouge III Presentation:** Josh Brooks, with Sasaki, consultant for Plan Baton Rouge III, presented the plan. Mr. Brooks summarized the extensive public engagement process for Plan Baton Rouge III, which included surveys, public meetings, and stakeholder discussions guided by the Executive Steering Committee and Community Advisory Committee.

Mr. Brooks stated that the plan positions Downtown Baton Rouge as a connected, year-round neighborhood district linked to surrounding institutions such as Louisiana State University and Southern University, while complementing broader regional initiatives related to transportation, economic development, and green space projects.

Plan Baton Rouge III emphasizes improving connections to the Mississippi Riverfront. Mr. Brooks noted that many recommendations focus on improving access to the riverfront, enhancing public spaces along the river, and creating development opportunities that celebrate Baton Rouge's identity as a river city.

The vision for downtown is centered on creating a vibrant, year-round neighborhood that supports daily life, economic development, entertainment, and residential growth. The goal is to transform downtown into a destination that functions beyond traditional business hours and remains competitive within the broader Southeast region.

Mr. Brooks explained that the plan recommends significant investment and economic impacts within the first ten years of implementation, including thousands of new jobs, increased tax revenue, additional private investment, and a larger residential population needed to support businesses, restaurants, and entertainment venues. Public investment is intended to encourage private-sector development strategically.

The plan is organized around five guiding principles, each supported by major ideas and detailed recommendations involving projects, partnerships, programs, and policy initiatives.

1. **Market Diversity** - Focused on strengthening downtown’s economic competitiveness through expanded housing, mixed-use development, student attraction, business support, and targeted policy and regulatory improvements.
2. **Cultural and Civic Spine** - Focused on celebrating Baton Rouge’s cultural identity through enhanced storytelling, wayfinding, public art, historical interpretation, and expanded cultural connections, including “walks of discovery” building upon initiatives such as the Civil Rights Trail.
3. **Clear Connections** - Focused on mobility and accessibility improvements through two-way street conversions, intersection improvements, pedestrian infrastructure enhancements, district connectivity, and support for transit-oriented development associated with existing and future transit investments.
4. **New Front Porch** - Focused on placing the riverfront at the center of redevelopment efforts through continuous riverfront access, major riverfront destinations, mixed-use development, and activation of approximately two miles of riverfront space.
5. **Developing the Edges of Downtown**. Focused on activating underutilized sites along the riverfront and strengthening development connections between downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.

PBR III includes more than 5,000 residential units designed to support the creation of several new neighborhoods that strengthen the existing urban fabric and establish more livable mixed-use centers. Emphasis was placed on providing a diverse mix of housing options to serve students, young professionals, state employees, families, and retirees, further establishing downtown as a destination not only for work, shopping, and events, but also for residential living.

Overall, the early investment plan identifies approximately \$1.5 billion in proposed investments. Plans Baton Rouge I and II previously generated roughly \$3 billion in investment. Mr. Brooks emphasized leveraging public, philanthropic, and private funding, with targeted public investments intended to catalyze additional private-sector development. The framework also prioritizes job creation and strategies to enhance downtown’s regional competitiveness, attracting businesses that might otherwise locate in surrounding suburbs. In addition, the plan proposes approximately 80 acres of new and improved public green space, building on prior efforts and recommending further enhancements to strengthen existing assets.

Key Riverfront and Downtown Initiatives

- **Sports & Entertainment District (Riverfront – North of Casino)**
 - Proposed use of long-vacant land north of the casino
 - Intended as a sports and entertainment complex
 - Designed to complement downtown without detracting from the core
 - Aims to create a major tourism draw

- Establishes a distinctive riverfront destination experience
- **Continuous Riverwalk & Connectivity**
 - Builds on the success of Third Street and the Shaw Center
 - Creates a continuous riverfront pedestrian experience
 - Enhances connectivity along the river
 - Supports new private development on existing surface lots
- **River Center Redevelopment**
 - Broad redevelopment framework around the existing River Center and convention center
 - Aligns surrounding public and private planning efforts
 - Positions area for additional investment
- **Riverfront Housing**
 - Focused on select underdeveloped parcels between the levee and River Road
 - Introduces new residential opportunities along the riverfront
- **Supporting Downtown & Adjacent Areas**
 - **Downtown East**
 - Builds on affordable housing successes
 - Includes streetscape upgrades, parks, and open space
 - A mix of housing types supported by public and private investment
 - **Main Street Corridor**
 - Envisioned as a small business hub
 - Connects Downtown East to the State Office Worker Complex
 - Positions larger parcels for future redevelopment
 - **Government Street / Northern Entry Corridor**
 - Critical entry point into downtown
 - Strategy centers on accommodating diverse, small-scale housing innovations
 - Supported by new policy tools and incentive programs
 - Streetscape and park improvements to enhance the public realm
 - Strengthens the connection between downtown’s civic core and surrounding neighborhoods
 - Links downtown to momentum and success in Mid-City
 - **Southern Gateway (“Gumbo Area”)**
 - Area located beneath the bridge near Expressway Park and the river
 - Envisioned as a key southern entrance to downtown
 - Connects Expressway Park to the riverfront
 - Focus on strengthening the Nicholson corridor
 - Builds on existing BRT investments
 - Emphasizes student housing development opportunities
 - Complements surrounding public and private planning initiatives

Mr. Brooks stated that the recommendations collectively support daily life downtown and position residential growth and neighborhood activity as drivers of long-term economic success.

Implementation Strategy

Mr. Brooks explained that the plan is organized into three major implementation phases. The implementation framework is divided into three phases:

- **Catalyze** – Strategic public investments intended to stimulate private development and increase downtown activity
- **Grow** – Policy and program initiatives focused on increasing residential growth, access, and neighborhood development
- **Evolve** – Long-term redevelopment efforts that build upon earlier phases and support continued downtown transformation

Mr. Brooks stated that the plan includes detailed strategic site analyses evaluating market conditions, construction costs, parking demand, financing strategies, and partnership opportunities necessary to support future redevelopment projects. In addition to major capital investments, the plan identifies several “quick-win” initiatives, including policy incentives, small business support programs, activation efforts, and tactical infrastructure improvements intended to sustain momentum during the early implementation phase. He further noted that each recommendation includes implementation steps, estimated costs, potential funding sources, responsible partners, and measurable success metrics to monitor progress over time.

Mr. Brooks stated that the recommendations were prioritized through a collaborative review process involving project partners, including BRAF and DDD, and emphasized the recommendation to create a cross-organizational “**Plan Implementation Committee**” to coordinate priorities, funding approaches, project phasing, and ongoing oversight of Plan Baton Rouge III implementation efforts.

Mr. Brooks concluded by stating that the plan presents both an ambitious vision and a practical roadmap for downtown Baton Rouge, while noting that similar revitalization strategies have been successfully implemented in comparable cities nationwide.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal thanked Mr. Brooks for the presentation and noted the significant community and committee involvement that shaped the plan, which includes both smaller improvements, such as cultural wayfinding trails and streetscape enhancements, and major catalytic projects focused on the riverfront. The riverfront vision follows successful redevelopment models in cities such as Omaha, Chattanooga, and Greenville, where waterfront investments attracted businesses, residents, and young professionals.

Whitney noted that the plan builds on existing momentum in Baton Rouge, including Bus Rapid Transit initiatives, improved downtown connectivity, and a 16.5 percent increase in residential development within the Central Business District over the past decade. Implementation will require continued collaboration among partner organizations and strong community support.

Patrick Michaels stated that it was appropriate for the Commission to formally express support for the plan and made a motion for a resolution in support of the measure. Eric Dexter abstained from the motion to support the plan. Patrick Michaels, Joshua Hollins, Gary Black, Susan Turner, and Gary Jupiter expressed their support for the plan’s vision and affirmed their commitment to collaborating with community partners to advance its implementation. It was noted that the next steps in the adoption process include review by the

Planning Commission on Monday, May 18, followed by the Metro Council on June 17.

Whitney invited questions and public comments from attendees.

5. Questions and Public Comment:

- A question was asked regarding public transportation and housing strategies included in the plan. Josh Brooks explained that the plan includes investments in public transit, including the proposed bus rapid transit (BRT) system connecting north Baton Rouge, downtown, and LSU. Additional recommendations include a complementary transit connection between Mid-City and downtown, as well as expanded pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to improve connectivity throughout the area.
- A question was raised regarding tools to support expanded residential development downtown, particularly given high land values and concentrated land ownership. Josh Brooks noted that the plan recommends several incentives and financing tools, including new construction tax credits, broader use of tax increment financing (TIF) districts, and technical assistance programs aimed at supporting smaller-scale residential investments. Emphasis was placed on encouraging a wider range of housing types and price points that are currently lacking in the downtown market.
- Karen Sonait, with the Louisiana Art & Science Museum, asked how the plan addresses the future role of cultural institutions that have long contributed to downtown initiatives. Mr. Brooks explained that the plan emphasizes investment in public spaces surrounding museums, particularly along the riverfront, to improve livability, attraction, and visitor activity. Recommendations include the development of a children's adventure playground to support weekend activity and increased museum visitation. He also discussed recommendations supporting collaboration among museums through a potential informal museum district focused on cooperative programming, ticketing, storytelling, and wayfinding initiatives.
- Elizabeth "Boo" Thomas expressed support and enthusiasm for the plan, stating that she was inspired by its vision and ambition. She referenced a quote from Daniel Burnham, who said, "Make no little plans, they have no magic to stir men's blood," encouraging bold planning efforts, and commented that the plan's ambitious projects and long-term vision provide hope for continued progress in downtown development. She emphasized the importance of community support and collaboration to ensure the successful implementation of the plan moving forward.
- Beau Jones, President and CEO of the Water Institute, commented that the plan is inspiring from livability, mobility, and community development perspectives and emphasized the importance of embracing the Mississippi River as a defining feature of Downtown Baton Rouge. He referenced the upcoming centennial commemoration of the 1927 flood as an opportunity to strengthen the community's connection to the river and its history. Mr. Jones also highlighted the importance of using the river as a unifying element to strengthen connections between downtown, the Water Campus, and surrounding developments, noting that the plan presents broader opportunities for regional collaboration, investment, and continued riverfront momentum.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal further emphasized the importance of strengthening downtown's southern institutions and venues to the core of downtown, particularly along the riverfront through the Nicholson

corridor. She noted that improved connectivity and enhanced transit access will be critical to linking key destinations and supporting public access to all downtown amenities and attractions.

- Eric Dexter asked a question regarding parking and the challenges created by the railroad corridor as a barrier between downtown and the riverfront. He noted that parking concerns are expected to be a major topic of public discussion and that the railroad has historically limited access to the river. Eric asked how the plan addresses both parking needs and strategies for overcoming the railroad barrier, particularly given the consulting team's experience working in other cities with similar rail infrastructure challenges.

Mr. Brooks explained that the plan included a detailed analysis of downtown parking supply and utilization, noting that downtown currently contains more than 11,000 parking spaces, some underutilized and others heavily used. Recommendations include improved parking management, enhanced wayfinding, and strategically located parking structures to support future redevelopment projects.

Regarding riverfront access, Mr. Brooks stated that the planning team intentionally avoided financially infeasible recommendations such as relocating or elevating the railroad. Instead, the plan proposes strategic pedestrian bridges, enhanced intersections, improved access points, and riverfront-adjacent public spaces designed to strengthen both physical and visual connections to the river.

- Elizabeth Dent Sumrall, a downtown resident, expressed support for downtown development efforts while raising concerns regarding the maintenance of existing landscaping and public spaces. She asked whether long-term maintenance funding and strategies were included within the plan.

Whitney Hoffman Sayal acknowledged that long-term maintenance will remain an important consideration as projects move forward and stated that maintenance planning must accompany future public investments and improvements. She explained that certain public-private maintenance agreements already exist for green spaces and noted that similar partnerships will continue to be part of future discussions. Residents were encouraged to report specific maintenance concerns through the 311 system and to the DDD office for follow-up assistance.

- 6. Adjournment:** There being no further questions or public comment, Patrick Michaels made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Eric Dexter and Gary Black seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.