

DDD COMMISSION MEETING, MINUTES

September 9, 2025

City Club of Baton Rouge, 355 North Boulevard

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

Absentees: Joshua Hollins– Secretary

Others in Attendance: Whitney Hoffman Sayal, Casey Tate, Iboro Udoh, Schuyler Olson, Ute Cress, Bridget Gaffney, David Korr, Debra Hudson, Clarke Gernon, Jr., Na'Tisha Natt, Adrienne K. Horn, Bubba Willis, Adam McCloskey, Jennifer Whittington, Bridget Henderson, Desiree Harris, Elisabeth McKinley, Jake Polansky, Nathaniel Tannehill, Mark E Martin, Suzette Crocker, Landon Hester, J Thomas, Charles Daniel, Chris Wright, Catherine Wood, Mysti Byrnes, Luke Lognion, Steve Juscen, Mark Goodson, Kennadi Wells, Gabriel Vicknair, Ken Williams, Ianne Solvosa, John O. Hearin, Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman, Darlene Rowland, Amelia Gabor, Madelyn Neilsen, Rannah Gray, Jason Crain, Alysia Guin, Caroline Marse, Ivette Peterman, Samantha Morgan, Morgan Udoh

Whitney Hoffman Sayal welcomed everyone to the DDD Commission meeting and thanked our host and breakfast sponsor, City Club. Attendees were welcomed by General Manager “Z” Zafer Goncu, who introduced himself and shared background on the club. The City Club is a private, member-based hospitality organization that has been in operation since 1894. It features eight private dining rooms and an Italian Renaissance-era architectural style. Mr. Goncu expressed pride in the club’s history and architecture and introduced Mary Milton, the Membership and Marketing Director. He invited attendees to enjoy breakfast and experience the club’s hospitality.

1. Patrick Michaels called the meeting to order and declared a quorum.
2. Gary Jupiter made a motion to approve the agenda, Gary Black seconded, and the motion was approved.
3. Patrick Michaels made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 12, 2025, meeting. Eric Dexter seconded, and the motion was approved

4. Board Action:

- **2026 Budget Fund Balance Approval** - Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. The DDD has been asked to prepare three budget scenarios, and the budgets were approved in August.
 - 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

Approval now is requested to use up to \$20,000 from the DDD’s \$1.1 million fund balance to restore budget line items reduced under the previously approved 6% and 12% city-parish funding scenarios. Approval now would allow the DDD to fill reduced scenarios and avoid future delays, since otherwise any fund use outside of the approved annual budget from the DDD fund balance would require Metro Council approval, slowing operations.

A motion was made by Philip Jordan and seconded by Gary Jupiter to approve the use of the DDD fund

balance of up to \$20,000; there was no opposition, and the motion passed.

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.
- **Booting Ordinance** - Whitney Hoffman Sayal updated the Commission. There was an item on the Metro Council agenda for a booting ordinance. That item was deleted and will be reintroduced at a later date.
- **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 – Deferred
 - HPC 14-25 – 840 North 8th Street, replace windows - Approved

Additional information can be found at the Historic Preservation website.

6 Development Initiatives:

- **Nexus, 440 Third Street** – Na'Tisha Natt, Director of Community Engagement at Nexus Louisiana, briefed the Commission. Ms. Natt stated that Nexus is a state-designated entity that supports tech startups, and does that through a variety of impactful programs while also connecting them to domestic opportunities. They are currently transitioning from the location on Florida Boulevard to Downtown Baton Rouge, to be closer to community partners. This move will enhance engagement with participants, industries, and government, fostering stronger community connections. Nexus will provide opportunities to engage not only with our participants but also with the broader community, gaining insight into the industries and government entities active in the region. Contact Nexus if you are interested in engaging or exploring ways to get involved.
- **Regus, 525 Florida Street** – Ivette Peterman, Area Sales Manager at Regus, briefed the Commission. Regus provides flexible workspaces, including private offices and communal coworking areas, for individuals and businesses on a daily or extended basis. If you need an office booking for one day, a meeting room booking, or a full-time office for 24 months, Regus is able to accommodate that. John O. Hearin, managing partner at Hearin Properties, announced that work is in progress to prepare the space to open for business in mid-September. The coworking space will occupy about 21,000 square feet across the building's second, third and fourth floors. FedEx Office remains on the ground floor. Regus operates more than 4,000 locations worldwide, including offices, coworking spaces, and meeting rooms in major cities. The company's rapid expansion has been driven partly by the rise of remote work since the pandemic.
- **St. James Episcopal Day School Update** – Jennifer Whittington and Bridget Henderson of St. James Episcopal Day School briefed the Commission. St. James Episcopal Day School, located in downtown Baton Rouge, is a distinguished institution serving children from 12 months to 5th grade. Recognized three times as a National Blue Ribbon School, it offers a unique model that supports students through all phases of early learning. A recent \$3.1 million capital campaign funded campus improvements, including a new playground with a custom play structure and tricycle track, a reimagined library with modern lighting and reading nooks, a new enrichment center for K-5th graders, and a Spark Studio for younger learners to foster creativity, problem-solving, and communication through hands-on STEM, art, Spanish, music, and physical

education. The school supports families with early drop-off, extended care, year-round schooling for the youngest learners, and an Episcopal bus service.

Applications for the 2026-27 school year are open, and the school invites downtown families to join its thriving community. Bridget Henderson, in her sixth year as head of school, encourages visits to experience the school's nurturing environment.

- **Farmers Market Economic Impact Study** – Jake Polansky, BRAC, and Darlene Rowland Adams, BREADA, briefed the Commission. The Big River Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance (BREADA), a Louisiana non-profit founded in 1996 by Susan Turner, supports small family farmers across 17 parishes along the Mississippi River. BREADA promotes agricultural businesses, preserves green spaces, and enhances community access to fresh food through initiatives like the Red Stick Farmers Market. Its mission focuses on three key areas: supporting farmers, ensuring fresh food access, and fostering community connections.

A study conducted with the Baton Rouge Area Chamber (Riverbend Research) analyzed the economic and social impact of the Red Stick Farmers Market. Key findings include:

- **Economic Impact:** The market generates \$3.7 million in direct economic activity annually, totaling \$6.7 million with indirect effects. For 47% of vendors, the market accounts for at least half their annual revenue, and 27% rely on it for 75% or more. Without the market, 44% of vendors would need to find a new line of work.
- **Food Access:** The market provides healthy food access to approximately 1,400 people within a 10-minute walk, particularly benefiting SNAP recipients.
- **Social Benefits:** The market serves as a vital community hub, with 95% of visitors citing reasons beyond shopping (e.g., socializing, enjoying music). For 43% of vendors, it's their primary social outlet. Additionally, 73% of shoppers feel more attached to Baton Rouge due to the market, enhancing the local quality of life.

The study, based on 178 surveys and vendor financial data, underscores BREADA's role in serving the community and addressing aging farmer populations, obesity, and loneliness.

BREADA will celebrate its 29th anniversary in November 2025 and is hosting a fundraiser, Farm Fete, on September 25, 2025, to support its mission.

- **Third Street Master Plan Update** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission about the Downtown Development District's (DDD) activities, noting they currently have four college interns. One intern, Abdullah Nabil, an LSU Landscape Architecture graduate student, created renderings and a video for a reimagined Third Street. The Commission reviewed PowerPoint slides and a video showcasing the first block of Third Street with proposed wider sidewalks, aligning with the master plan's recommendations. Currently, the area is illegally used for parking, but the proposed design would maintain designated parking and unloading zones for businesses while adding more space for activities, resting, and dining.
- **LSU Innovation Center** – Adam McCloskey, Director of the Louisiana Small Business Development Center at LSU, addressed the Commission. The LSU Innovation Banner's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) provides no-cost consulting to small businesses in the Baton Rouge area, funded by LSU, Louisiana Economic Development, and the Small Business Administration. Recognized statewide with SBDC Day in March, the Baton Rouge center, one of ten in Louisiana, has helped businesses attribute \$16 million in impact this year, the best in the past three years. Services include cybersecurity support through the LSU Cyber Clinic, AI integration via Google certification, and international trade assistance. Inspired by the revitalization of downtown Pensacola, the SBDC aims to support Baton Rouge's

downtown by offering weekly on-site consulting to foster small business success and community vibrancy. The initiative starts soon, with details to be shared via email, encouraging local businesses to engage directly.

- **River Road Pedestrian/Bike Trail (West Side)** – Iboro Udoh, DDD, briefed the Commission. The River Road Pedestrian Bike Trail project aims to extend the existing path from Baton Rouge’s Central Business District, where it currently ends at Queen Drive (Queen Casino), to connect with residential areas in the northern industrial park. This quarter-mile trail, averaging 5-6 feet wide, will provide a safe, alternative transportation route for residents of nearby apartments and condos, allowing them to walk or bike to the Central Business District, levee, or the Greenway without crossing streets. The project, recently awarded to Alfaro Bros Concrete Construction after bidding, awaits council approval to begin construction. Funded 80% by a Recreational Trails Program grant, it maximizes a modest budget.

- **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 downtown development district (DDD) has approximately 4,000 residents. Data shows that most residents work outside the district, with the fewest present at 1 p.m. The most common workplace zip code is 70808 (Mid-City, Garden District). Resident presence increases significantly after 5 p.m., with a 22% rise by 6 p.m. and nearly a 40% rise by 8 p.m., indicating that downtown remains active in the evenings. Over the course of six months, hundreds of thousands of impressions reveal residents moving in and out of the district. Additionally, residents frequent theaters, with the Cinemark Perkins Row, four miles away, attracting about 200,000 visitors per six-month period, suggesting potential for a theater downtown.

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 – The only work remaining is some pedestrian push-button improvements at the intersections. Work should begin next week and be completed at the end of September.
 - North Boulevard – Work is complete.
 - Laurel/Lafayette Street – Construction has started, and most of the concrete and sidewalk work is complete. There's still some striping and pedestrian push button work to complete. Expect this one to be finished towards 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, about 90%. This will connect the sidewalks from St. Phillips to the Mississippi River levee trail to help provide access to restaurants, bars, and entertainment in the area, and also the parking under the interstate.

The Bus Rapid Transit project will be constructing 8 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 plans on doing this work along with Nicholson Road. There are several stations on Nicholson toward LSU. They want to hold off and do the work after the football season to help with public inconvenience. It should begin sometime during the first part of the year.

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. Call the rapid response number 224-389-3123 for any construction-related problems that require urgent attention.

- **Entergy Downtown Updates** – Gabriel Vicknair with Capital Projects with Entergy and Desiree Harris from Customer Service, updated the Commission on managing several downtown projects. Entergy's resiliency program, a five-year, \$2 billion initiative, involves 2,100 projects statewide to harden Louisiana's power grid, including replacing or upgrading 69,000 poles to improve reliability and storm resilience. In downtown Baton Rouge, over 250 projects, valued at \$8 million, focus on pole replacements and underground lines, with completion expected by year-end.

A key project, managed by Vicknair, is the Beauregard New Duct Build along St. Charles to North Boulevard to replace an aging system, enabling new circuits and future expansion for downtown growth. This project, BR-21, involves 2,600 linear feet of construction, starting now and finishing in January, followed by BR-17 for wire installation. The work includes tunneling to avoid traffic disruption, with minimal impact, such as single-lane closures.

The first phase is under construction now and is to be completed this month, from France to Louisiana Avenue along St. Charles. Community outreach ensures businesses face minimal access issues. The second phase will be from September 26th to November 12th, moving toward North Boulevard. The project aims to prevent outages and support downtown's economy, with the final phase concluding by January 19.

Desiree Harris briefed the Commission on the upgrades to the street lighting downtown. In the next 4-6 weeks, all the upgrading of the street lights from high-pressure sodium to LED will be completed. Whitney Hoffman Sayal pointed out the areas where the lighting upgrades will be in the Central Business District, from Government Street to North Street, River Road to the I-110 interstate, and east from the interstate to 14th Street at the railroad tracks.

- **Neighborhood Nights Recap** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal briefed the Commission. Our next DDD Neighborhood Social is being held on Thursday, October 2. Stay connected by subscribing to our resident newsletter; reach out to the DDD staff to get signed up.
- **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. 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. 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.

An RFQ was issued to select artists, attracting 29 local, national, and international submissions.

Despite having so many artists, they ended up with two local artists. The finalists are 1st, Bryson Boutte from Lafayette, 2nd, Brandon John LaSalle Moultrie from Atlanta, and 3rd, Antoine Mitchell from Baton Rouge. The artists will be notified of the selection, and a public unveiling and celebration is planned for later in 2025, featuring discussions with descendants of civil rights leaders.

This was a fully community-driven initiative, with public participation shaping both the history told and the designs implemented.

- **Love Our Downtown** – Schuyler Olson presented to 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 downtown. Stickers will be available at the office by Wednesday or Thursday and at the October meeting. Yard and window signs are also available for pickup. Pictures were shown with examples of residents proudly displaying the yard signs, even outside of downtown Baton Rouge. The new stickers feature the Lincoln Theater, the old Governor’s Mansion, and LASM, alongside original designs like the Old State Capitol, the New State Capitol, the Rotary Sculpture, and Live After Five. These items are available out front after the meeting.
- **New Businesses:**
 - **Deminola Blends, 307 Third Street** – Smoothies and Juices, Grand Opening Monday, August 18. Owner, Leo Sanfie

7. Events - Schuyler Olson updated the Commission:

- Tunnels for Towers, Saturday, October 18, 8:00 am, North Boulevard Town Square
- Live After Five Fall – 6 Concerts beginning Friday, September 12, 5:00 – 8:00 pm
- Farm Fete – Thursday, September 25, 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm, Main Street Market
- Live After Five Fall Concerts – 6 Concerts beginning September 12
- Geaux Ride Anniversary Party – 521 N. 3rd Street, Saturday, September 27 from 2-10 pm
- Frankie Beverly Tribute – Sunday, September 21, 4-8 pm, Rhorer Plaza
- Murder Mystery – Friday, October 3, 7-10 pm, Shaw Center River Terrace
- Manship Theatre – Movies, Music & more
 - Chris Thomas King
 - Sharpe Family Singers
 - Karla Bonoff
 - Manhattan Short Film Festival
 - It’s Never Over: Jeff Buckley
 - Ruthie Foster
 - Asleep at the Wheel
 - Dumpastunk
- LSU MOA – Current Exhibits
 - Disk Full: Christine Bruening and Janna Ahrndt, Glassell Gallery
September 6 @ 12:00 pm - October 9 @ 5:00 pm
 - A Bayou State of Mind
- Old State Capitol –

- Contemporary Views of the Castelatted Capitol
- Vietnam Experience Collected Works U.S. Navy Combat Artists
- Spirits of Louisiana, Thursday, October 30
- Capitol Park Museum –
 - First Free Sunday
 - Billy Cannon Exhibit through January 10, 2026
- Raising Canes River Center & Theatre Fall Season:
 - 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
 - Hometown – November 25
 - Mrs. Doubtfire – April 21
 - Riverdance 30 – June 22
- LASM – Shows and Events
 - Threads of Evolution: Engineering a Community That Sparkles
 - Puttin’ on the Ritz LASM 40th Annual Gala, Friday, October 10
- Old Governor’s Mansion – First Free Sunday, October 5, 11-4 pm
- USS Kidd – Veterans Museum Open Daily from 9:30 AM – 3:30 pm
 - Strong and Calm Warrior Yoga, Saturday, October 4, 8 pm
- Baton Rouge Arts Market – October 4, from 8 am – 12 pm
- Red Stick Farmer’s Market – Every Saturday 8 am – 12 pm

8. Commission Announcements & Updates:

- **IDA Top Issues Council Brief** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal stated she was selected last year to serve on the International Downtown Association's (IDA) Top Issues Council. She and the members of the council contributed to a brief that explores the best practices in stakeholder engagement, with Downtown Baton Rouge being highlighted as a key case study. She stated the brief has been published, and she was privileged to be part of that group.
- **Plan Baton Rouge III Update** – Eric Dexter announced the second community survey for downtown development recently closed, with thanks to participants. The survey, combined with in-person community meeting input, has helped identify and prioritize key character areas like along River Road, downtown east, and northern downtown. These areas reflect community priorities for downtown’s future. Current efforts involve gathering input from focus groups, the Downtown Development District (DDD), state, and parish stakeholders. By October or November, specific projects, strategies, funding plans, and potential policy changes will be outlined. A final draft plan is expected by year-end, with adoption targeted for early 2026 by the Metro Council, City, and others. Community input remains crucial to the planning process.
- **DDD Tax Elections** – Whitney Hoffman Sayal reminded everyone that the DDD tax renewal election is being held on Saturday, October 11, 2025.

9. Public Comment:

- Mysti Byrnes, from the Big River Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance (BREDA), which

operates the Red Stick Farmer's Market, highlighted their annual fundraiser, Farm Fete, on Thursday, September 25th. The event supports BREADA's initiatives, featuring great food, drinks, and fun, with participating restaurants like City Club. For those unable to attend, \$20 raffle tickets are available online at farmfete.org, offering a chance to win a year of date nights. Handouts with details are available outside the door.

- Luke Lognion announced the opening of a speakeasy inside Circa 1857, just one block from downtown and within Councilwoman Coleman's district, and forthcoming updates on Blues Fest. Major decisions have recently been made and will be shared at the next meeting.
- Amelia Gabor, the new communications lead at the Baton Rouge Bar Association, announced a Jambalaya plate lunch sale on October 17, benefiting the association's youth education programs, such as mock trial competition, teen court, and law day. Tickets and additional details will be available at the next meeting.
- Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman expressed enthusiasm for the positive downtown developments shared by Whitney and requested a list of events with dates and locations to feature on her podcast. Councilwoman promoted the event, "Sunday for the Soul: Capital City Tribute to an Icon," honoring Frankie Beverly's life and legacy, scheduled for September 21 from 4-8 p.m. at Rhorer Plaza. The event includes an area for children to sell goods, highlighting the importance of youth involvement.
- Ken Williams, a resident of Beauregard Town, expressed gratitude to the Downtown Development District (DDD) and Entergy for their attention to downtown issues but raised concerns about overly bright street lights at night in residential areas. These lights may disrupt bird migration, insect life, plants, and nearby residents. The speaker suggested installing apron-like structures to focus light downward onto streets, reducing the impact on adjacent homes. Whitney Hoffman Sayal urged Mr. Williams to address and discuss this issue further with Entergy

10. Meeting adjourned – Patrick Michaels moved to adjourn the meeting, Gary Jupiter seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.