

Master Plan Update

Draft Kickoff Summary

Thursday, April 25, 2019, 10:00am - 2:00pm

Attendees

Client Team

Chelsea Tallo, Executive Director of DDD
Olivia Graziano, Assistant Director of DDD

DDD Committee

Pierre Theriot, DDD Board Chairman
Justin Thornhill, Merchant Committee Chairman
Jeffrey Smith, Design Committee Member
Roy Dufreche, Design Committee Member
Todd Delaune, Merchant Committee Chairman
John Guerin, Events Committee Chairman
Bryan Wong, Farmers Market Committee Chairman

City Council

Carlee White Gonzales, Councilwoman for District 2
Steven J. Leon, Councilman for District 5
[Unknown Councilman]

Historic District Commission

Jennie Garcia, Hammond Historic District Coordinator
Jessica Shirey, Vice-Chairman of the Hammond Historic District Commission

Consultant Team

Matt Rufo, Project Manager, Asakura Robinson
Alex Miller, Principal-in-Charge, Asakura Robinson
Mayu Takeda, Deputy Project Manager, Asakura Robinson

10:00 - 11:00am

Review scope and timeline of deliverables with EBRRA staff and consulting team

The client and consultant team reviewed the Kickoff document, including the Scope of Work and Timeline for the Master Plan Update.

- A biweekly check-in call is scheduled for every other Wednesday at 1pm, and the first check-in will begin on May 8, 2019.
- The consultant team is to provide the Public Participation Plan by the first check-in on May 8.
- The first public workshop on the vision for the project is scheduled for July 13, which will coincide with the DDD's "Chalk Walk" event (8:30 - 1:00pm). The public workshop will be hosted from 9:00am to 1:30pm.
- Stakeholder interviews will be held in May, with the exact day to be determined. The interviews will take the form of focus groups and involve the following groups:
 - » City officials, including City Planning and the Historic District Commission
 - » DDD Merchant Committee
 - » DDD Residential Committee
 - » DDD Design Committee
 - » DDD Events Committee
 - » Tangipahoa African American Heritage Museum
 - » Area colleges and universities, including Southeastern Louisiana University
 - » Tangipahoa Parish Convention and Visitors Bureau of the Greater Hammond Chamber of Commerce
- The second public workshop on implementation is scheduled for August 29. The meeting will be scheduled after work hours and will be open to the public.
- The Community Priorities Survey will be launched in May through end of June
- Destination Downtown, a "regional conference co-sponsored by Main Street Arkansas, the Mississippi Main Street Association, and the Louisiana Main Street program," will be hosted in Hammond on the week of September 9, 2019. The client requested that the project team prepare visual materials summarizing the master plan.

11:00 - 12:30pm Tour of study area

DDD staff and committee members organized and led a walking tour of the study area. Pierre Theriot of Holly & Smith and DDD Board Chairman, Justin Thornhill of Nortech and Merchant Committee Chairman, Jeffrey Smith of Holly & Smith and DDD Design Committee, and Roy Dufreche of Roy Dufreche & Associates and DDD Design Committee joined and shared their perspectives on current challenges and opportunities in the district. The Consultant Team noted the physical, economic, and social conditions.

The tour was then taken inside due to inclement weather, and a virtual tour via Google Earth was provided, and tour participants provided further context to the study area.

Design committee members pointed out the improvements which enhanced walkability in the downtown area, such as the widening of sidewalks and methods to slow car traffic by providing on-street parking and curb extensions. At the same time, there were missing pedestrian crossings, where stripes were not painted to connect sidewalks, and trees meant to mark the ends of on-street parking spots were not aligned with parking. Some business owners are also said to dislike the large trees planted on the sidewalks.

While the City shares many objectives with the DDD to create an attractive public realm, it does not always enforce the DDD's design guidance as demonstrated by instances where there is a paved parking lot in front of buildings.

Committee members stressed the potential of opportunity sites, including the southwestern block of W Coleman Ave and SW Railroad Ave, owned by the City, and the southwestern block of W Morris Ave and SW Railroad Ave, owned by a private developer. The committee discussed condos as a potential future land use, given the current lack of this type of housing.

The committee discussed potential programs to incentivize attractive development, including a USDA-funded revolving loan fund targeting enhancements to building exteriors and a DDD-financed incentive program for property owners. They also suggested framing attractive design as a way to increase the tax base when discussing enforcement of the ordinance with the City.

12:30 - 2:00pm

Lunch and goal-setting exercise with stakeholders

Accomplishments since 2002

Attendees felt that Downtown Hammond had become a much more attractive and livable area since 2002, when the DDD had their last master plan. Historic buildings have been renovated and many of them are occupied, with a 12.37% vacancy for the district as a whole. Committee members discussed the warm experience that attracts shoppers to the area, with one describing it as “beat[ing] the mall at their own game.” Columbia Theatre and Cate Square are seen as major attractors.

Members pointed to the historic tax credits as a key factor in funding renovations, and strategic partnerships with the City and the Historic District Commission, which facilitated positive developments in the area.

Another area which has improved since 2002 is the relationship with Southeastern University, which is largely a commuter school, meaning its student population often came to Hammond for classes, but often bypassed downtown. Since the last master plan, the DDD has assisted the university with orienting students to the area, built relationships with Southeastern’s marketing and athletic departments, and conducted surveys of students. In addition, more students are now living in Hammond rather than commuting from elsewhere, meaning there is a larger base of visitors to the area.

Areas for improving physical and social connections between Downtown Hammond and Southeastern University were further identified, such as greater walkability via Pine Street, bike sharing and bike trails, and adding a stop downtown for Lion Tracks, the university’s shuttle.

Diversify Uses

Attendees pointed to specific goals, including an expansion of the Downtown Development District, a hotel, grocery store, conference center, and a museum closer to the core of downtown. An attendee also noted that it is very difficult to open a bar in the district because of zoning restrictions, which should be examined for potential updates. Others also expressed interest in having a variety of different kinds of retail, rather than just bars and restaurants.

Improve Accessibility/Parking

Parking was discussed as an opportunity and a challenge, with some suggesting the construction of a parking garage with ground-level retail as a way to provide parking for workers and residents, and freeing up parking for visitors. Better management of on-street parking was also discussed, and attendees suggested creating time limits or charging for time.

Improve Connections to Nearby Destinations
“Connectivity” was identified as a key word in the discussion, both in terms of the physical connection from Downtown Hammond to other areas of the city, and in terms of organizational relationships between key stakeholders. Zemurray Park was suggested as a catalyst and connector, and a quarterly joint meeting between City Council, the HDC, and DDD was discussed.

Zemurray Park was brought up as an underutilized asset, and a suggestion was made to move the Hammond Smokin’ Blues & BBQ Challenge from downtown to the park. This would allow people to park in the area and still walk to downtown; the Blues & BBQ Challenge location on the parking lots makes it difficult for non-event customers to access downtown. It is held on the same weekend as Strawberry Cup, a college soccer tournament, which could be another source of visitors, but lack of parking has prevented additional visitors from coming downtown.

Enhance the Public Realm

Attendees identified further opportunities, for developing Downtown Hammond into an even greater attractor, including more green space and trees and enhanced lighting. Public art and music was also identified as potential attractors, as well as a better pedestrian experience where walking continues to be less than an ideal option. Business leaders suggested more frequent trash pickup and more public garbage cans, and wayfinding was identified as a key component in assisting visitors and creating an attractive public realm.

Defining Success

Stakeholders in the room were asked to name key components to a successful DDD Master Plan. Revitalization outside of the core was identified as a core element, as was feasibility for the DDD, which currently has a small but dedicated core team. Strong partnerships between the DDD, the City, HDC, and the Chamber of Commerce were also identified as cornerstones to success.