



Board of Directors Public Hearing – Hot August Night

Tuesday, September 20, 2022 | 5:30 PM
Hammond City Council Chambers
312 E. Charles Street, Hammond, LA 70401

Roll Call: Chelsea Tallo Little, Executive Director

Frank Di Vittorio	Present
John Daniel Guerin	Present
John Exnicios	Absent
Elsbet Hollywood	Absent
Cassie Ragan	Present
Evan Singer	Absent
Bryan Wong	Present

New Business:

1. Hot August Night Post-Event Feedback

Frank DiVittorio opened with the purpose of the meeting to discuss feedback from the 2022 Hot August Night event that took place on Friday, August 26th. DiVittorio explained the DDD conducts an evaluation of the event every year and there is always discussion about what the future of the event looks like. DiVittorio mentioned the purpose of the meeting is to solicit input to improve the event, but no action would be taken by the board at the meeting. DiVittorio invited Michelle Kendall to provide a summary of the feedback survey.

Kendall provided an overview of the Hot August Night 2022 Feedback survey including event successes, event improvements, business impact, and communication.

Frank DiVittorio noted that the DDD attempts to balance many interests when planning for events, especially when considering how the organization is funded by property owners within the district and other areas to DDD leads such as the Main Street program. DiVittorio opened the floor for public comment.

Amanda Adams, owner of Bayou Booksellers & Gift Shoppe at 201 W Thomas St Suite A, approached the podium. Ms. Adams noted that she is not a supporter of Hot August Night as it stands. She mentioned that any event sponsored or resourced by the DDD should support all Downtown merchants. She mentioned that Hot August Night years ago worked well for the community, but since Downtown has experienced so much growth, and Friday is one of the busiest days of the week, street and parking closures hinder businesses ability to operate the day of the event. She urged to not plan any more events on Fridays. She also mentioned that if a future event or festival were to take place, it should be city sponsored. All DDD events should focus on the wants and needs of merchants. Planning moving forward should include merchants to move forward positively and aligning with the DDD mission statement. She urged to end Hot August Night as an event.



Justin Thornhill, owner of Nortech at 110 E Thomas St, approached the podium. Mr. Thornhill mentioned he was in favor of keeping the event but felt the parking closures were too excessive and hindered business the day of the event. He stated he lost money during the day of the event.

Luke Greer, the owner of Shack's Restaurant at 201 E Thomas St, approached the podium. Mr. Greer mentioned he did not know what to expect with this event as it was his first operating a location in Downtown Hammond. He said the parking closures were unexpected and despite the barricades being moved at midnight, parking spaces were still blocked over the weekend from stacks of barricades that weren't picked up. He mentioned the Hammond Regional Arts Center is planning an event with food trucks in October and felt Downtown businesses should get the first consideration when planning events Downtown. He said the event is good for Downtown and urged better planning with business owners and looking into a permitting process for food trucks.

Anthony Donze, the owner of Pour House Pizza at 505 W Thomas St, approached the podium. Mr. Donze gave insight into the factors of the restaurant industry. He felt that the invitation of food trucks at any location in Hammond would be detrimental to restaurants in Downtown. He noted that restaurants are densely packed in Downtown and many businesses do not offer lunch as it would be cost-prohibitive. He noted that in his time being the business owner of Blackened Brew, he was frustrated with the BBQ & Blues Festival taking up parking spots. He mentioned that despite the appeal that they would shop and dine at Downtown restaurants, they did not. He noted that barricades inhibit parking opportunities for businesses. He noted it took him 5 years to build a lunch crowd and Fridays would see triple sales in a normal weekday. He mentioned he would like to see the event stay, but the weather happens to be another issue that occurs. He urged more emphasis on a cooler weather event. He noted that he saw a small bump in the night sales, but it did not even out with a detrimental lunch crowd. He mentioned he invested additional funds to host activities to draw the event's crowd.

Dan Lambert, owner of Mr. Mules Kitchen and Cate Street Pub at 116 N Cate St and 118 N Cate St respectively. Mr. Lambert provided a background on the origin of Hot August Night as an event. He stated that it was originally designed to provide a boost to businesses during a slow summer season while school was out of session. Mr. Lambert expressed disappointment to see outside businesses set up in front of his business on the day of the event. He mentioned that he asked Frank DiVittorio the day of the event to inquire about who decided to host food trucks at the event. Mr. Lambert stated that Frank told him it was a staff idea. Mr. Lambert further inquired about who approved the food trucks. He said Frank stated the city approved it. He stated that he thinks the only problem with the DDD and events is leadership. He stated that it was not taken seriously by Frank the night of the event, despite having a downtown business for over 25 years. He further stated the purpose of events is not to celebrate the DDD as an organization, it should support the merchants. He further expressed frustration with a non-local artist being selected to paint the mural in Railroad Park and asked for an apology from the DDD. He stated that Hot August Night is a great event and since merchants pay for the event, it should support them.

Frank DiVittorio read an email submitted by Jessica Shirey, owner of Nolan Stewart Salon. She expressed discontentment with the event in its current format and stated their businesses will no longer participate as a business. She also stated the decision to include outside vendors and food trucks was a poor one and should not continue. She expressed frustration with the DDD administration.



Ms. Chelsea Little stated that everything heard tonight has been heard and will be taken into consideration. She stated the words 'Hot August Night' alone can bring 10,000 people and scaling the event to draw a smaller crowd for the police to manage would likely not happen. Ms. Little apologized to Dan Lambert for the food trucks at the event. She stated programming became essential a few years ago when large crowds could not be comfortably hosted in restaurants. She mentioned she would like to move forward with a merchant-led schedule of events for 2023.

Mr. DiVittorio noted that in his time with the DDD, there is negative feedback about Hot August Night every year and he posed the question to cancel the event because it has come up by previous boards and staff members every year. He urged attendees of the meeting to work with the DDD and provide input on future events. He wanted merchants to help decide if Hot August Night will remain an event. He stated he is equally open to speaking with any business owner.

Mr. Lambert asked if food trucks were going to be placed in front of his business again. He said Hot August Night should continue as an event. He also expressed discontentment with Frank. Mrs. Little mentioned that the meeting is a public hearing and no action will be taken tonight.

Ms. Adams inquired about the parking closures and if it's possible to not close parking. Mrs. Little attempted to explain conversations she had in planning with the police department.

Mr. Donze inquired about the closure of the 100 & 200 blocks of E & W Thomas. Mrs. Little explained the closure of the highway was not feasible, but other options were explored by the police department. The most feasible option explored was metal barricades along the parking spots to accommodate for increased pedestrian activity anticipated for the large crowd. For safety, the police did not want anyone to cross anywhere other than designated crosswalks. She mentioned that shifting the event times and days may affect the size of the crowd and other options would be explored.

Attendees discussed the time parking spots were closed and if that could be modified. DiVittorio noted that towing and ensuring cars move in time would be a concern.

Assistant Chief Angelo Monistere of the Hammond Police Department approached the podium. Mr. Monistere mentioned that the department's main concern is safety and knowing that the event involves alcohol consumption, he noted that there are many safety concerns. He explained the metal barricades would help extend the sidewalk and contain the pedestrian activity crossing the road at the intersections. He mentioned zero incidents occurred and 64 officers worked the event. He stated that the food trucks allowed officers to eat during their shifts. He stated he was unaware of barricades borrowed from Ponchatoula and unaware that the barricades remained. He further stated that since the weather was not ideal, the crowd size was smaller than anticipated. He stated the police department's perspective the event was a success. He stated that the department would like to close the road during the event.

Mrs. Little asked about what parking closures would look like later in the day. Captain Monistere mentioned that an officer was stationed from 8AM – 3PM the day of the event to run plates and remove cars from the parking malls. He noted that Cate Street parking was open until after lunch the day of the event. He stated the longer parking waits to close, the more cars have to be towed. He reiterated that safety would remain a priority for future events.



Mr. Thornhill inquired to Captain Monistere about the closure of the highway (E & W Thomas). He stated that the closure would require special permitting from the state and stated it would be a difficult task to shut down the highway for hours. Mr. Thornhill mentioned that other cities have shut down highways. Mr. John Daniel Guerin mentioned that there was grandfathering in or other procedures not known by the DDD. He mentioned that the closure was explored after the 2019 Hot August Night event, but options did not seem attainable.

Ms. Cassie Ragan stated that Hot August Night was created to welcome everyone back and encourage more activity. She stated that it was a successful merchant event 10 years ago, but the changes make it difficult for businesses to prosper. She stated that the DDD board should not be the only voice in making decisions about future events and that communication and participation are welcomed. Ms. Ragan urged business owners to go back to see how Hot August Night has changed for them over the years. She stated that it needs to change and noted the lack of communication about closures.

Ms. Little gave her email address and urged participation from business owners. Ms. Adams stated that she would like to see face-to-face communication from DDD staff.

Brandon Robertson, track coach at St. Helena High School, approached the podium. He stated the event has been great for his team in raising funds and looks forward to working with the DDD and events every year.

Mr. Bryan Wong shared his experience with owning three restaurants and how his businesses plan for the event. He stated the event should change but not be shut down.

Mr. Donze urged Mrs. Little to coordinate another way to feed the police department without food trucks. Mrs. Little mentioned that planning for this event needs to start in January.

Attendees discussed the highway closure again and wanted to explore the block closure more closely to understand the process to request a closure and implement traffic diversions. Attendees discussed the human capital required to coordinate the closure and if that would be worth the time.

Ms. Adams inquired if Hot August Night would ever be a merchant event. She expressed that she would prefer to see a targeted effort to focus on what makes Downtown Hammond a gem. She mentioned that if the event is not a merchant event and it brings 10,000 people during a festival environment, it is not worth the effort in planning. She was not supportive of a highway closure if it means affecting business parking. Mrs. Little mentioned that options will be explored and Hot August Night attracts a crowd. Ms. Thornhill interjected. He stated his business does well after the event. The exposure is good for this business.

Mr. DiVittorio mentioned that a shift in the event would need to be strategically done to manage the public's expectations of the event. Attendees and board members discussed how the event has changed over time and areas that work and do not work.

Attendees and board members discussed options moving forward and a direction for the event to find a better path. A discussion of a refresh and rollout for January 2023 occurred.



Mr. Di Vittorio closed the meeting.

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