

The News-Star (Monroe, Louisiana) August 23, 2012 Thursday
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Official: Growing cultural district good for economy

By Barbara Leader

An expanded cultural district in Monroe will mean more tax credit opportunities for developers, business owners, artisans and art connoisseurs, **Gaye Hamilton** of the Louisiana Cultural District announced Wednesday.

Hamilton and Monroe Chamber of Commerce President and CEO **Sue Nicholson** announced the expansion of the existing Riverside Cultural District in Monroe.

The district, which was established in Monroe in 2009, will expand about one block from the existing area to the Endom Bridge and across into West Monroe.

"The program is an effort to help communities boost economic development in these areas," Hamilton said. "The cultural development district is a tool to use to encourage and strengthen economic vitality of an area based on a hub of cultural activity."

Cultural districts offer advantages to those wishing to renovate buildings or open businesses in the established area by offering tax breaks. Those purchasing original artwork sold in the designated cultural districts do not pay state or local sales taxes on the purchases.

"The original designation of the Riverside Cultural District includes many of Monroe's museums, art galleries and historic homes," said Nicholson. "The recent expansion of the district includes areas of downtown Monroe that are ripe for cultural development."

West Monroe also has a cultural district along Antique Alley. Although the Riverside Cultural District in Monroe will not connect with the West Monroe district, Nicholson said the group hopes the inclusion of the Endom Bridge in the Monroe district will be a step toward their joining.

West Monroe West Ouachita Chamber President **Courtney Hornsby** said plans are for West Monroe to apply to include the property between the existing districts, about a 2 1/2 block area, creating a large cultural area.

Members of the business and cultural community met Wednesday afternoon to learn about the benefits of a new expanded cultural district in Monroe.

"The Riverside Cultural Districts designation and expansion provides the city of Monroe with an additional tool to foster the growth of our cultural assets," said Monroe Mayor Jamie Mayo. "The designation, supported by the City Council, will be especially important to the RiverMarket, which is opening in mid-October."

Nicholson, Hamilton, and Hornsby met with members of The News-Star's editorial board Wednesday morning.

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