

It is an inspiration these last few days to see the care and concern that people have for the look of Downtown Mobile. We have long advocated for high standards of development and an attention to detail in public infrastructure. There was a time when no one would have cared what was built on any block. Now people care and they care passionately. To that end, the Downtown Mobile Alliance advocated for the adoption of form based code for downtown so that there would be a prescriptive code to guide the rebuilding of the many vacant and unsightly lots. In other words, the code requires that new development establish a specific context and form and to reinforce a sense of place. In the core of downtown, the proper form places the architecture at the frontage property line – especially on Bienville Square.

The Mobile City Council adopted the code in May 2014 and established the Downtown Development District. Within the DDD, there are general guidelines about the buildout of properties. Things like materials, frontage design, transparency, and parking lot screening are all specified. The developer of the Hilton Garden Inn received their Board of Zoning Adjustment site plan variance before May 2014 and therefore the city's legal advisors said the project would be permitted under the pre-DDD zoning code.

The DMA joins the city and the Mobile Convention and Visitors Bureau in welcoming the development of the Hilton Garden Inn in downtown. The parking lot where the hotel is going was an unsightly trash-strewn asphalt desert. All of the retail and professional businesses around the site will benefit from the activity generated by this hotel. Bienville Square will benefit from having an active retail use providing day and night eyes and ears to the goings-on of the square. That is what Bienville Square has lacked for too many years.

Cowart Hospitality has a proven track record as a fine developer and manager of lodging facilities in our city. They are excellent neighbors and generous corporate citizens. The Cowart family members have numerous times expressed how much they love Mobile and believe in its future.

One final note, the DMA has no enforcement authority of any kind. The DMA is a property owner and business membership organization. It advocates for development downtown and for public policies that encourage high quality redevelopment of all types while providing cleaning, horticulture, hospitality, and marketing services to improve the user experience for all-comers.