

State approves cultural districts

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The state has approved midcity Baton Rouge and downtown Lafayette for cultural products districts, a designation that seeks to promote arts development by waiving sales taxes on original works sold within the districts and providing tax credits for rehabilitating the districts' historic buildings.

Kerry Broussard, economic development manager for the Mid City Redevelopment Alliance, said she had been notified by the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism that Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Minden, Crowley, Lake Charles and Welsh were approved in the most recent round.

Baton Rouge already has districts downtown and along Perkins Road. It is the first for Lafayette, which applied in November.

Local governments in each city have already signed off on the plans.

Art patrons in the districts will enjoy a break from the state's 4-cent sales tax when purchasing original works of art.

Local sales taxes are waived as well, but not in the case of Lafayette, where local taxes are pledged to repay bond debt.

State income tax credits of up to 25 percent of restoration expenses would be available to fix up homes in the district, with the highest credits reserved for residents with adjusted gross incomes of \$50,000 or less.

Similar tax incentives would be available for restoring commercial buildings or rental property of historical significance.

"We're very excited," Broussard said. "We have a very strong arts and culture (community) in Midcity."

Broussard noted the Midcity art hop that is held twice a year has participants that are arts-based retailers and even many that are not but enjoy taking part of the growing event.

Broussard said the sales tax breaks go into effect March 1 and Midcity is holding an informational meeting at 6 p.m. Tuesday, at St. Joseph's Academy, Mother Alice Hall, 3080 Kleinert Ave.

There will be a reception at a gallery in early March, but the details are not finalized yet.

Midcity describes the Florida Boulevard area around Baton Rouge General Medical Center. In general, the area is bounded by 14th Street, North Street, Foster Drive and Government Street.

The cultural products district is slightly larger and is generally bounded by North Street to the north, Claycut Road to the south, Kenwood Avenue to the east and Interstate 110 to the west.

Lafayette's cultural products district boundaries take in the downtown area and some surrounding neighborhoods.