

# Whatever it takes

A year ago today President Bush stood in Jackson Square and promised that the nation would come to the aid of our storm-ravaged community. New Orleans, he noted, was “nearly empty, still partly under water, and waiting for life and hope to return.”

His speech resonated with hundreds of thousands of people who had been driven from their homes by Hurricane Katrina and the flooding that followed.

“We will do what it takes, we will stay as long as it takes, to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives,” he said. “And all who question the future of the Crescent City need to know there is no way to imagine America without New Orleans, and this great city will rise again.”

The people of greater New Orleans needed to hear those words a year ago, and we need the promises made that night to be fulfilled.

A year later, we are part-way there.

To his great credit, President Bush pushed Congress to commit billions of dollars to repair and rebuild tens of thousands of ruined homes and to repair bridges, schools and hospitals. The federal government has put in place special tax credits to encourage businesses to invest in our hardhit communities. The levees and floodwalls that failed during Ka-

trina are being repaired and in some cases strengthened.

More than 1 million people are living in metro New Orleans today, a statistic that is remarkable given the devastation wrought by the storm and its aftermath. Still, tens of thousands of our neighbors have been unable to return, and thousands more cannot live in their homes.

There is \$110 billion in the pipeline for the recovery of the Gulf Coast, but only \$45 billion has made it to people and projects here — and much of that was for the immediate costs of rescue and triage. It is crucial to get the remainder of the money to the people and businesses who need it. It is vital, too, for the necessary resources to be committed to the long-term flood protection of greater New Orleans and the restoration of Louisiana’s coastal marshes. Neither has happened yet.

On the anniversary of Katrina, President Bush reiterated the nation’s commitment to this region’s recovery and cautioned that it will take a long time. Those of us here know the difficulties first-hand, and we realize that the ultimate responsibility for rebuilding is ours.

But the damage done by Katrina and by the failure of the federal government’s levee system is too vast for us — or for any community — to fix on our own.

## Conclusion

### UNOP Implementation Process

The UNOP planning process results in the publication of two different products: District Plans and the “Citywide Recovery and Rebuilding Plan” (Citywide Plan). The Citywide Plan will be submitted to the City Planning Commission, the City Council and the Mayor for formal approval. Following this, it will be available for the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) to incorporate into the State’s recovery planning. The Citywide Plan will be action-oriented, primarily focused on infrastructure projects designed to hasten the recovery of the City and guide public and private investment decisions. Every recovery project that is identified in the District Plans will also be incorporated into the Citywide Plan and will, therefore, be submitted to the LRA as a potential recovery project.

The recommended projects resulting from the UNOP process may require changes to various City plans and policies. These may include the City’s Master Plan, Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO), building codes, and capital improvements program. Additional implementation issues and recommendations will be articulated in the Citywide Recovery and Rebuilding Plan.

### Grassroots Implementation of Projects and Goals

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*“We can plan all you want, but in the end, you need public policy, you need implementation and you will need funding.”*

Frederic Schwartz, Times-Picayune, January 7, 2006

## Housing Policy for New Orleans

### Towards an Equitable Housing Program for New Orleans

Ronald Shiffman

We propose a comprehensive housing strategy and new policies to accelerate the development of affordable, equitable, just and sustainable housing in New Orleans. This policy addresses the responsibility that design professionals – planners and architects – have as promoters of the public interest and advocates of the built environment and their responsibilities in the consequences of housing density, site planning decisions, land use and zoning.

The elements of a comprehensive housing policy for New Orleans cannot be distilled into a simple sound bite or set of catchy slogans. New Orleans, because of its distinct, fragile geography and demographic diversity, needs a broad and complex set of policies to address its housing and community development needs. Its different neighborhoods and its different people, in differing economic circumstances, need different approaches to address their common right for shelter.

To achieve this today means that we need a housing policy that is inclusive. One that addresses New Orleans diverse population – the homeless, low and moderate-income families, seniors, new immigrants and those on fixed income. It means that we need a housing policy that recognizes the new ways we live and work, one that recognizes that some of the forms of yesterday will not meet the needs of today and tomorrow. And we must be sensitive enough to know that what exists is the foundation and heritage upon which we must build.

Our housing policy must be predicated on preserving what we have, upgrading what needs to be upgraded and building anew for those that are ill-housed and for those who will need housing in future. That is a daunting challenge for architects, planners and

developers. We must do it in a way that does not undermine our ability to continue to build. And we must do it in a way that is cognizant of the ominous threat of hurricanes, flooding, global warming and the imperative of sustainability.

We must undertake development in a way that garners the support and the resources to meet future needs. We must gain the support and confidence of the majority without inflicting pain on any minority and without prejudicing future actions.

We recommend inviting the very best national architects, planners and housing experts to rejuvenate the neighborhoods of New Orleans, bringing them back from the brink of abandonment and setting the stage for their revitalization. We recommend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as the target date for a call to action.

We will forge a working relationship with national environmental justice and sustainable development advocates to take a hard look at the City's housing and surrounding neighborhoods. For example, we will investigate the de-commissioning of a mile of I-10 to re-connect Treme and Lafitte to build a revitalized community providing opportunities for housing, culture, recreation and education. In this case, to demolish an unneeded and unwanted roadway and replace it with a re-united community is significant in both its substance and national message. In proposing to tear down a highway and rebuild a community, in essence, we are inverting the formula that has destroyed so many communities and undermined so many American cities.

### The Role of Community-Based Developers and Technical Assistance Organizations

Housing policy and housing development goes beyond just the creation of units to the development of viable, affordable and sustainable places. We need to promote horizontal and vertical networks that inform and help mobilize citizens and professionals focused

on the built environment -- in the process educating both the people and themselves. Networks are needed to create the political momentum to establish housing and community development legislation.

We need new leadership to promote investment in our neighborhoods instead of policies of financial institutions to disinvest in our communities. We know that process as redlining. Today our federal government is redlining our cities. We need to confront them and hold them accountable to meeting the needs of our people. The ongoing and empowered post-Katrina process of community engagement from the bottom up is crucial. We recommend a working group of community-based organizations and technical assistance providers to develop programs to deal with immediate and long term housing needs.

We need new programs and policies to revitalize our neighborhoods. The private sector, the banks, and our government have virtually abandoned the residents of the super block public housing neighborhoods. As a result of the organizing efforts and advocacy of community based-organizations, some in government are now first listening. Take for example, a reversal of policy by HUD/HANO from wholesale demolition of much needed housing at St. Bernard, B. W. Copper and Lafitte to a phased approach of demolition that will re-open thousands of units.

First, preserve and renovate the majority of the existing buildings – it will cost less and no developer will ever build to the quality and standards of the masonry construction. Advocate for policies to protect the buildings by discouraging demolition and encouraging selective renovation instead of wholesale demolition.

Develop a comprehensive housing policy comprised of a combination of tenant protections, preservation strategies, and development that includes both rehabilitation and new construction. Recognize the important role of tenant organization as the first line

of defense against building demolition and the loss of housing – in essence recognize the important role tenants can play in the preservation of their own housing stock.

Create new forms of ownership and management, and develop new ways to finance the rehabilitation of units that need rehabilitation. Turn over adjudicated properties and vacant lots in the surrounding neighborhoods to a new Rebuild New Orleans Community Development Corporation comprised of elected resident and neighborhood leaders, forward thinking bankers and developers and national housing advocates to build new infill affordable housing.

Promote advocacy on behalf of the Diaspora and the disenfranchised and address poverty by enabling and empowering communities to advocate on their own behalf to produce a comprehensive coordinated social, economic and physical revitalization plan.

We must combat the detrimental effect of the incipient decline of rental housing in our neighborhoods and the out-migration of middle-income families and the adverse impact of both mortgage and insurance redlining on the community.

Political influence is and remains the key. Let us adopt the position that if government and the private sector are unable to address the needs of the community then the community should do it themselves. The vehicle – to plan and implement are Community Development Corporations (CDC).

The idea of the corporation was embraced by Senator Robert Kennedy. He toured the Bedford Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn in New York City, lent support to the idea of the CDC, and assisted in raising the private and public resources to launch the corporation in 1966-67. Thus, the first community-based development corporation was born. It was assisted by grants from a group of foundations including the Astor Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation. The legislation created 10 CDCs

throughout the country. Bedford Stuyvesant was the first, but today there are over 5,000 such groups working to revitalize their communities – models, many of them, for urban rebirth across the country.

### Advocates and Community-Based Developers are Pro-Development and Successful

As an example, in New York City alone, community-based housing organizations have, in partnership with the city and the private sector, sponsored and renovated over 80,000 units of housing. These groups have set the stage for the private sector to re-enter scores of neighborhoods where, in the not-so-distant past, developers would have feared to tread.

One myth we would like to dispel is that community-based developers, community organizers and environmental justice advocates are anti-development. They are not. Anyone who looks at the numbers and at the role they have played will see their record of accomplishments. They have preserved and rehabilitated hundreds of thousands of housing units and preserved the historic character of many of our cities.

Most importantly, they have enabled many places to retain their genius loci – their genetic footprint – the form that gives the distinctiveness and unique character to particular neighborhoods that is essential to New Orleans. They helped spawn the environmental justice and industrial retention movements. And they spurred greater attention to sustainable planning practices and green building approaches.

The contribution of community design practitioners to the practice of architecture is often misinterpreted. Community design – when practiced genuinely – is not simply having planning, design and development professions contribute their know-how and talent to low and moderate-income communities. It fundamentally recasts urban and regional planning, architecture and community building. It embraces a trans-disciplinary approach to design and community development and a substantive understanding of the way people live, work, and develop.

True decision-making and true empowerment arise from choosing among informed alternatives. Without debate how can a new aesthetic be introduced? How can the important issues and values that transcend any particular community be put on the agenda? How else can we confront exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices, particularly when they masquerade as market decisions or, in some cases, as a misrepresentation of the desire to preserve the character of an area?

The planner/architect/designer and the community (including its most vocal activists) must practice honest engagement and mutual respect. Otherwise, neither is empowered or capable of making informed decisions. The outcome is doomed to being mediocre at best. In all probability, the result will be an aesthetically and functionally irrelevant undertaking.

Underlying the concept of community-based planning and design is the recognition of the diversity and pluralism that makes up our communities. It recognizes that our cities and communities are complex, made up of people with different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. It recognizes that within and between these groups are people with differing aspirations and visions of the future. Planning and design approaches and housing policies, therefore, should recognize diversity and build upon it. Diversity itself can become a building block of a new approach to community planning and housing design.

Practicing architecture, planning and development in a diverse, pluralistic and democratic environment requires a broader set of skills than practicing in a homogenous and more autocratic environment. However our housing and planning policies today are designed for an economic order that promotes homogeneity and discourages diversity.

Community meetings are often contentious, comprised of people who move in and out of the picture, operate at different levels of information and disinformation, have differing needs and values, but,

in the end, provide the spark for creative planning and design. But if you gain the confidence of the group, you're making progress. They become the key to unleashing the creative processes that enable the planner and designer to work outside the box, to implement new ideas and provide the support to overcome entrenched bureaucracies, to address narrow biases and to avoid business as usual.

### Preservation and Spatial Diversity

Preservation of the existing affordable housing supply is critically important. Pre-Katrina there were a total of 7,379 (including 760 in scattered site housing) HUD/HANO housing units in the City of New Orleans with approximately 5,146 units occupied. Currently there are approximately 1,000 occupied units with more than 5,000 units in jeopardy of being demolished in the immediate future. While some residents will be able to get vouchers, many others will be jeopardized by newly adopted federal rules. Families face not only increased rental burdens, but also the real possibility of being displaced, being forced to move to other parts of the city or out of the city altogether. We must pay attention. Otherwise we as a city will succumb to the forces – market and political – that foster displacement and economic apartheid.

### A Move to Preserve Affordable Housing

New Orleans like New York should pass a Tenant Empowerment Act. This law gives tenants and not-for-profits the right to purchase Section 8 developments. However, the right to purchase becomes meaningful only for those who have the financial and organizational capacity to convert that right into reality.

The City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana should provide the financial, technical and legal resources necessary to make a Tenant Empowerment Act work. That means access to financing and assistance in building the capacity of residents to assume ownership. It also means assurances that HUD project-based subsidies are kept in place and renewed.

We must go beyond rhetoric and proactively focus on the preservation of publicly assisted housing. New Orleans should set aside funds for use by tenants and not-for-profit groups to convert at-risk developments to permanent affordable housing. Finally, but very importantly, we should find political capital in the City, State and professional organizations to advocate that HUD provide the appropriate resources and protections to tenants of all publicly assisted housing. We can and should do no less.

### Need for New Development

Preservation of our neighborhoods and the existing housing stock must be the foundation upon which we build and expand our housing supply, particularly for low and moderate-income families. However, we also need an enlightened and aggressive approach to the construction of a substantial number of new affordable housing units. Given the present housing shortage, we must plan for future growth. We need to reTHINK our approach to density and reverse the trend to reduce density (such as HUD's mandate to reduce density by 2/3) and downzone.

We need to increase the housing supply by making better planned use of existing sites and identifying new sites for development without displacement. The improvement of the public realm and our infrastructure must take place concurrently with the development of housing. People not only need places to live, but they also need places to work, shop, learn and spend their leisure time.

How and where we build will either enhance these opportunities or hinder them. The issue is not only a quantitative issue but also a qualitative one. We need to not only plan to meet future needs but also to plan to achieve the kind of neighborhoods that people want and deserve. We must provide both housing and job opportunities. Given the present shortage of affordable housing and potential growth in population particularly in Basin One, the overwhelming need for future development must be for

low-, moderate- and middle-income housing, and for places for new immigrants and their children to be educated and employed.

The lens through which we should look at site selection for housing development includes improving the public realm, locating development adjacent to public transit and a commitment to build in a sustainable and green manner. Additionally there is a need for more manufacturing space, if for nothing more than to produce the components of sustainable housing that will be needed by expanded and green development. They will need to be produced somewhere in the region. Why not New Orleans? The demands for housing built in a sustainable manner might in and of itself kick start a manufacturing boom in the City for environmental products such as a new Development Zone in Gert Town and Zion City.

We will need live-work spaces to engage those in new sectors such as technology and the yet undiscovered industries of the future where life styles may differ significantly from those of the past. We will need to design and develop new mixed-use buildings and building prototypes that will truly become 24 hour communities.

How we accommodate, plan and design for these changes are a challenge that we must address as we look forward to development over the next two decades. Similarly, if we think in terms of issues of equity, social justice and fair share then we must begin to address economic and spatial segregation. We must forge programs and policies that thwart our tendency toward economic apartheid and find ways to foster social and economic cohesion.

**Rebuild New Orleans Community Development Corporation: Restructure our Program, Planning and Development Processes**

We recommend a restructuring of New Orleans housing policy, program, planning and development

processes. We can do it NOW or we can succumb to shortsighted concepts that build barriers separating communities and ignore the inherent qualities of the surrounding communities. We need a participatory processes to develop programs, land-use plans, urban design guidelines and a transparent selection processes.

We need new leadership charged with meeting the diverse needs of affordable housing and structured in such a way as to garner community support for a variety of development options that range from mid-size to mega-projects, on publicly controlled land.

We recommend a new Rebuild New Orleans Community Development Corporation by convening a working group comprised of civic and resident leaders, developers, housing and community activists, trade union leaders, architects and planners, and environmental and environmental justice leaders to determine how to best program, plan and develop affordable, sustainable, quality housing. There are examples of innovative models of development such as those in Hamburg and other parts of Western Europe, as well as New York’s Urban Development Corporation and its Roosevelt Island and Battery Park City communities. What we plan and build today will be with us for generations and we should take the time to reTHINK and do it right.

Large-scale qualitative housing projects of sufficient densities are needed to meet the demand for housing and sustain associated schools, programs and other neighborhood development and infrastructure requirements. Government needs to develop a means by which projects can be planned and brought to fruition in a timely manner.

What is needed is a process that engages the public in substantive programming, planning and decision-making process that is efficient and meaningful. That is, to promote low-income affordable and mixed-income racially integrated housing, engage in eco-

nomie development activities and foster community development. In doing this we should develop a participatory process that fully engages area residents in the planning and development processes necessary to achieve the goal of equitable and accountable development. In addition, the planning process must be accompanied by a building and development process to be carried out in a timely way, generating sustained job growth in the construction trades and in the maintenance and operation of these facilities.

A Rebuild New Orleans Community Development Corporation, as described above, should work with community-based organizations, housing intermediaries, HUD, the City of New Orleans, and private developers to provide high-quality, affordable housing. This entity could partner with, lease portions of, and engage in the development and/or management of new and substantially rehabilitated housing.

**Conclusion**

It is imperative that affordable housing initiatives be undertaken by all levels of government and confronts the difficult issues of racial and economic segregation that continue to plague our society. First, there is a role and responsibility for the Federal government that has for far too long withdrawn from real involvement in addressing the nation’s housing needs.

The City of New Orleans must also play its role in meeting the affordable housing needs of its population. It has done too little in recent years, but it has shown its ability in the distant past when Lafitte, St. Bernard, B. W. Copper and Iberville flourished when first built. It must take a new leap in the leadership of financing new construction as well as in promoting smart and sustainable growth, and assuring that equitable land use and development is a priority.

The role of the City of New Orleans and community-based advocacy and development groups working in partnership with the private sector is paramount.





New Orleans can't wait for other levels of government to act, albeit that it desperately needs their financial resources, but must itself invest in the building of its own neighborhoods for those in need of housing today and for its future generations.

The City must use all its resources and creativity to recommit and rebuild its vastly diminished capital investment in housing, accessing all available sources to preserve and build affordable housing. Funds should be set aside for development by qualified community-based not-for-profit housing groups. They have the track record and a commitment to meeting the needs of the lowest income residents. New Orleans should take a leadership in the provision of affordable housing in partnership with and not dependent upon the private sector:

- Directly create new housing, upgrade substandard apartments, preserve the existing housing stock and stimulate private investment and development by undertaking a sustained 10-year capital investment plan. This would preserve the existing supply of publicly assisted housing. Produce well-designed and environmentally sustainable affordable housing.
- Implement land use and zoning policies that provide diversified housing and employment opportunities for all. To achieve this, a citywide plan should be developed in a participatory and transparent manner that would build on the work conducted by the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) planners and work in concert with the neighborhood actions being proposed. Various initiatives could be woven into a broader framework guaranteeing low and moderate-income housing opportunities around the New Orleans.
- Adopt inclusionary housing requirements like those in London and other "world cities" that 50% of all new housing be set aside for affordable housing and that a combination of incentives, capital subsidies and regulations be adopted to achieve this objective.

- Establish a Rebuild New Orleans Housing Trust Fund -- a stable long-term source of revenue for housing --insulated from the political vagaries of the moment. The fund should be fueled by a number of dedicated sources of revenue: surcharges on the rent and sale of luxury apartments, interest on real estate escrow accounts, surcharges on real estate transactions, inclusionary bonuses from office development and luxury housing and from other city, state and federal revenue source

The challenge is how do we as architects and planners, as professionals whose talents and advice are relied on by so many best develop a housing approach of inclusion and equity? And how can we develop an architecture predicated on meeting the housing needs of those with the least among us?

We must investigate how architecture and urban planning can promote social justice and equity. We must understand the cohesive potential of public space and how and where we build housing and for whom. We must engage in that effort first, as professionals dedicated to a sustainable and enriching environment, and secondly, and equally as important, as citizens dedicated to the principles of a participatory democracy – one committed to opportunity for all its people.

**Our housing policy must be predicated on preserving what we have, upgrading what needs to be upgraded and building anew for those that are ill-housed and for those who will need housing in future.**

## A Vision for Public Housing in New Orleans: Planning for Sustainable Human Habitat

Carlton Brown, Full Spectrum of New York

For a long period prior to Katrina, it was no secret that public housing in New Orleans, like public housing in much of the country, had failed. Though there may be an infinite number of factors by which failure may be measured, the most fundamental failure of public housing in New Orleans has been its inability to sustain its residents so that they and their communities could grow and prosper. Too frequently the bar for housing is set far too low and acts as a barrier to the creation of other assets required for a successful community. We must ask more than “Did the housing keep the residents warm and dry or cool and dry?” or “Did it provide adequate shelter?”

In New Orleans, we should be asking the more critical question: How can we create sustainable human habitat? According to Webster’s, habitat is “the place or environment where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives, grows and prospers.” Using this definition, there are few, if any, who claim that New Orleans’ public housing has provided sustainable “habitat” for its residents. What must change is the consensus among the most responsible stakeholders.

The success of the New Orleans regional economy will be largely determined by its success in creating a sustainable human habitat where public housing once existed and finding, defining and executing the changes to make this possible. Though there is a vigorous bilateral public debate regarding the future of public housing in New Orleans, it has generally been too narrow to provide solutions as to what may be an intractable problem if the pool of solutions is limited strictly to those that have been tried before.

Some argue that all public housing should be demolished, that the density should be reduced from 45 dwelling units per acre to 15 per acre and that the

neighborhood should be repopulated through some formulaic mix of low-income, moderate-income and middle-income housing, effectively reducing the number of people in the community and disbur-sing low-income people to parts unknown or simply pretending they never existed and have no long-term stakeholder rights in the community. Conversely, there are those who argue that the existing public housing in New Orleans should simply be restored, upgraded and re-occupied by the people who have traditionally lived there. They argue that the only stakeholders welcome to the community should be those who have always been in the community, i.e., there is no room/consideration for new stakeholders. They would further argue that new stakeholders are welcome, but given the economics of choice, who other than the poorest of poor would choose to live in communities in which few of the amenities that make communities desirable are available. Both of the extreme arguments are wrong. Both are anchored by approaches from the past that don’t adequately deal with the present crisis or prepare the city to grow, regain its vigor and leverage private sector assets to create a new sustainable community in which social equity is a reality for all existing stakeholders while creating a platform that attracts and embraces the new stakeholders that are required to make the city healthy. The future of New Orleans relies on its ability to find solutions to its housing shortage that create better opportunities for all economic groups, stronger communities and displace no one.

First, housing density is not the issue. Well-planned community development is the primary issue. New Orleans’ most recognized successful community, the French Quarter, is also its most dense. It is a community planned around open public spaces and includes retail, culture, and housing. Though people often speak of high density as the primary failing of public housing in New Orleans, poorly planned community is what distinguishes public housing from the French Quarter. Though the French Quarter fails to provide housing opportunity for a broad range of household income ranges, it does create a community that is



*“We’re not saying all or nothing. I don’t agree at all with total demolition, but also I’m not the person to decide whether there’s total demolition or totally saving the buildings, it’s part of the process and what we’re saying is that we should work together with the residents and we’re working with people who live in the buildings and who have lived in the buildings who grew up in them -- like Dr. Marshall Truehill, to have participation from the people who live in and work with the community and also the residents so we find some common ground so people can immediately return.”*

Frederic Schwartz at District 4 Meeting #4 on Jan. 6, 2007

desirable. It has all of the amenities that support successful human habitat.

Second, reliance solely on the historical vernacular architecture of New Orleans’ past to secure its place as a sustainable community in the future is a recipe for failure. Over time, with the impacts of climate change, the city will become more vulnerable to severe storms. The technological means are available to develop a new architectural vernacular that effectively resists the impacts of a changing ecological environment. All housing, even New Orleans’ traditional housing, was designed to address a specific set of environmental and economic conditions. Public housing was designed to meet a much more narrow set of conditions. It simply had to be cheap enough to be built with whatever government subsidies were available at the time.

Today, there are new materials and techniques available through a system of technology-transfer from the aerospace industry, ship builders, the computer and the auto industry to develop cost-efficient housing that is better-suited for the changing environment. Smarter building methods and smarter buildings from new materials and techniques will allow the city to reduce the cost and improve the environmental efficiency of new housing. New communities can be developed where public housing once stood. The following should be included as critical objectives in the creation of a sustainable human habitat:

- The orthogonal street grid should be re-established. The grid is a proven system for organizing densely populated communities and contributing to the establishment of place. Place-making using the street grid is an important element in many traditionally designed southern cities – creating public squares, such as Jackson Square. When public housing was developed in New Orleans, the lessons of place-making commonly observed in successful dense urban environments were ignored.
- Carefully consider housing density as it relates to

neighborhoods. Across the city, do not mandate a decrease in density from 45 dwelling units per acre to 15 per acre in the public housing areas. As a point of reference, think about Paris with its 6-story buildings on city blocks with public open spaces. Density will allow low-income residents to return to their old communities and provide housing for moderate and middle-income buyers to move to the affected communities.

- Use government subsidy to build retail space that would attract middle-income residents and provide incentives for quality retailers to locate in the community. For instance, create a space for Target and offer them \$1 per year rent for the first three years of operation. Starting the fourth year, convert to a percentage rent (percentage of gross sales starting at 5% and working up to 15% of gross sales in the 5th year. Moderate and middle income buyers will not move to these newly re-established communities unless the communities have the commercial infrastructure to support them. By increasing the density and designing homes to attract moderate and middle-income buyers, the community will at least triple the amount of disposable income it had prior to Katrina. Quality retailers make many of their location decisions based on the relative buying power of the community. By increasing density, retaining low-income populations, but providing below market rents as an incentive to attract quality retailers, the community will become attractive to moderate and middle income buyers.

Under standard market conditions, retailers expect to pay about 10% to 15% of their gross sales in rent. The free rent the first years and percentage rents later on minimize the risk for retailers and make them more likely to locate in a community that is not yet back. On the other hand, by virtue of their decision to locate there, the communities will regenerate. Strategies which reduce residential density and decrease the disposable income will ultimately not have

the retail amenities to make them successful. Based on the targeted income/disposable income projections for the community, government subsidies should be used to develop the appropriate amount of retail that should be required to support the community.

- Public investment in housing should be used to leverage private investment from commercial banks, investment banks and insurance companies. There is a large pool of institutional money that is investing specifically in urban communities through public private partnerships. There is no community in America that is better positioned, vis-à-vis, guilt or social responsibility to take advantage of these private sector initiatives.

JP Morgan Chase, as a result of their merger with Bank One, has an \$800 billion Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) commitment to invest in communities like New Orleans. Bank of America and Wachovia have similarly large obligations. No other community in America has more social capital than New Orleans has to attract this investment. In addition to commercial banks, there are several closed end urban funds like Phoenix Fund, Goldman Sachs UIG, Cherokee Investment Fund, Urban America, Canyon Johnson Urban Fund, AIGRE, Calvert Fund and HIT that collectively have more than \$10 billion targeted for mixed-use, mixed-income equity investment. The public sector must fashion programs to attract and leverage this investment with public sector money. HUD, LRA and all Go Zone monies should be structured to leverage private investment.

This investment will be secured only by planning sustainable communities where private sector investors have comfort that they are in fact investing in a healthy habitat. Communities that lower density, decrease disposable income and are not built to withstand the world’s changing climate will ultimately propel the malaise of the past.



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## NEEDS, VISION, AND GOALS FOR PUBLIC HOUSING COMMUNITIES

Dr. Marshall Truehill, Jr.

### INTRODUCTION

This report was compiled from personal interviews of a number of public housing residents, the personal knowledge and experience of the writer, and comments recorded in meetings of public housing and non-public housing citizens of New Orleans. A major problem in New Orleans is the tendency of policy makers and other stakeholders to meet, discuss, and make plans regarding public housing developments without the input of the people who live in those developments. The residents are avidly averse to such practices that underestimate their intelligence, integrity, and ability to make or help make decisions about their own destiny and the future of their neighborhoods.

The residents have filed suit in Federal Court to force the reopening of the housing developments to allow residents to return home and to stop the possible demolition of the developments. A ruling is expected in early 2007.

One of the more unfortunate realities in post-Katrina New Orleans is the barring of public housing residents from returning to their homes, even though the vast majority of these units received little or no damage from Katrina's winds or flooding. Further complicating this situation is the announcement by the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) and The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) of their decision to demolish B.W. Cooper, Lafitte, C. J. Peete, and St. Bernard Housing Developments even though these units are structurally sound and architecturally valuable, and in spite of the fact that C. J. Peete is on the National Register of Historic Places, and at least four others are eligible for nomination to the Register.

Many policy makers and pundits are operating under the assumption that public housing residents are not planning to return to New Orleans. On the contrary, all of the residents with whom this writer has spoken have indicated their desire to return to their units in the developments in which they lived pre-Katrina. Each month more and more of these residents are returning to the city with no place of their own to live. Some have openly protested the closure of their neighborhoods, and even set up a Survivors Village on St. Bernard Ave. Each Monday night, resident leaders and their supporters meet at the Village to plan and strategize.

New Orleanians, especially public housing residents, who evacuated to cities across America, are likely to return home when the 12 – 18 months of FEMA rental assistance runs out. Data has shown that New Orleanians tend to stay in New Orleans due to a strong sense of attachment to the land and communities where they were born and nurtured. Rather than be homeless in Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, and other places, they will come home to be homeless where there is familiarity, support networks, and kinship networks. The worst possible assumption is that people will not return to the city. The question is when, not if.

A growing number of citizens, both public housing residents and non-residents, architects, planners, lawyers, preservationists, media people, ministers, and community activists have been meeting weekly for several weeks organizing to protest the demolition plans. They vow to put up an intense fight, both locally and nationally, to keep the developments open and to bring attention to what many residents perceive as a conspiracy to rid New Orleans of all public housing, public education, and public health facilities. This opinion by residents is based on their experiences over the past thirty years with local and national policy makers who have proposed to demolish public housing developments in New Orleans. During the administration of Mayor Sidney Barthelemy, the Rocheon Plan was commissioned to determine what should be done with New Orleans' public housing developments. In essence, the plan recommended that the developments be demolished, the people be relocated, and the land be redeveloped. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Senator Richard Baker is quoted as saying, "God did for us what we have been unable to do for thirty years, clean up public housing in New Orleans." Comments such as this are cited by residents in conjunction with the actions of the City, HANO and HUD to fence off housing developments that suffered little or no damage from Hurricane Katrina that gave rise to a conspiracy theory.



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## DISPEL MYTHS ABOUT PUBLIC HOUSING

Guste Housing Development has a strong resident management corporation that continually assesses needs, designs and implements strategies to meet those needs, and tracks their overall progress as a community. According to Ms. Cynthia Wiggins, Resident Manager of the Guste Homes, public housing communities as a whole, not just Guste Homes, need for the New Orleans community at large to stop perpetuating myths about public housing residents. Some of the more popular myths are that all residents of public housing are lazy, shiftless leaches on society; that public housing developments are the source of all crimes committed in the larger community; that the buildings are so badly deteriorated that they all must be demolished, and that high density and concentrated poverty must be decreased to lessen their impact on the city. Even if some of what is popularly believed by the majority of New Orleans' citizenry was true in the past, it is no longer true today due to changes in policies that made it almost mandatory that residents be gainfully employed to stay in public housing. Only a small percentage of residents who live in public housing are on some sort of public assistance, such as social security or SSI for elderly or handicapped residents. With the changes that came with welfare reform, a smaller and ever decreasing number of young women with children are on welfare rolls. There are some residents, for whatever reasons, who are unemployed or underemployed. A change in the way public housing is perceived by the market housing community would make it less likely for public housing communities to always be at the mercies and whims of politicians who want to make a name for themselves with those who have no understanding at all of what it is to be part of the working poor and underprivileged. Ms Wiggins points to an 86% employment rate in Guste, which she believes is true for all of public housing in New Orleans, a low crime rate in Guste because of the management's and the tenants' active roll in addressing the issue of crime, enforcement of management rules and the creation of a family type atmosphere among residents. Ms. Wiggins believes HANO could do a better job of reducing problems in the developments it manages if they would simply enforce the rules that are already on their books.

## INCLUDE PUBLIC HOUSING LEADERSHIP IN HOUSING STRATEGY FORMULATION

Too often discussions, public debate, and housing strategies are formulated without public housing resident leadership at the table. Public Housing communities represent a significant segment of the New Orleans housing market and should not be left out of such deliberations. Instead, market housing people discuss and make decisions about public housing as though residents of public housing cannot or don't want to have input about their own lives and communities. Such practices are presumptuous and disrespectful. The sheer numbers of public housing tenants alone warrant their inclusion in any decision making process resulting in dispositions or actions taken concerning public housing communities.

## POLICY MAKERS NEED TO RETHINK THE DENSITY ISSUE

The density issue, as many critics and policymakers see it, is just not true and serves to contradict certain principles of economics. Decreasing the density of public housing communities is seen as one solution to alleviating the negative impact perceived by many non-public housing citizens. This idea has merit for many local and national policy makers, because decreasing density means decreasing or demolishing buildings, even though a consideration of the number of residents per acre of land in New Orleans' developments shows the density to be far less than many public housing developments in other major urban centers of America. Since retailers and providers of goods and services tend to follow the market, decreasing density in public housing communities only serves to strip the community of those who provide the goods and services necessary for sustainability of the community. Instead of decreasing density, policymakers should be looking for ways to increase density in communities in order to attract economic investment to the community. Businesses locating in or near the community also create needed jobs for community residents. Ms. Wiggins says she understands how some people are apprehensive about the concentration of poverty in public housing communities, but the concentration of poverty is not only due to people of low incomes living in the same area, it is due to low wage jobs, discrimination in the workplace, a lack of quality education, and many other factors that contribute to the concentration of poverty in a neighborhood. Ms. Wiggins also believes that moving people from one neighborhood to another does nothing to alleviate poverty in such people's lives.



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Residents disagree with the concept that the density of public housing developments needs to be decreased. They don't believe density is a contributor to the problems popularly perceived as unique to public housing communities. Compared to market rate apartment complexes, public housing communities tend to have more open green space and are no more than three stories high in New Orleans as opposed to other larger cities with as many as 15 to 30 stories. Also, unlike many other public housing developments around the country that have long corridors with apartments on both sides of the corridor, New Orleans public housing units have either private entrances, or no more than four to six units sharing the same common entrance way. The number of people per acre in public housing is less than many high rise condominiums and apartment complexes in New Orleans and other cities in America. The new complaint relating to the density issue tends to be used in conjunction with what many are calling concentrated poverty. Again the issue is not density but poverty. The solution to concentrated poverty is not to spread the poor around to other areas of the city, but rather to work to alleviate poverty through better schools, better and higher paying jobs, and greater access to business opportunities for the poor. Moving poorer residents out of public housing and allowing people of greater economic means to move in does not change the density of the community, in actuality, we end up with the same number of people per acre.

Residents are split over whether the idea of mixed income communities will work for public housing communities. Some residents don't believe people who have never lived in public housing developments and even some of them who have lived in the developments at one time, will want to live in them given the negative reputation of the developments. Ms. Yvonne Marrero, resident manager of the B. W. Cooper Housing Development, expressed strong opposition to the idea of mixed income public housing communities. She believes people of higher incomes already have enough options of where to live, but housing for people of lesser means have fewer and limited options. She believes public housing neighborhoods should be restricted to people of lower incomes. On the other hand, a greater number of residents seem to believe a mixed income community can work in public housing. It will work, they believe, for people whose incomes fall in the middle range of incomes. They don't believe people of significant wealth and means will live in a community with people whose incomes are at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum. They cite too vast a difference in life styles for that mixture to work. Making a mixed income public housing community work will have to include renovating or developing market rate housing immediately surrounding the developments. They also suggest that the incomes can be mixed among public housing residents themselves. This would be accomplished by assisting more public housing residents to become homeowners and small business owners in or near the development in which they live. The idea of allowing residents to purchase their units was also suggested as a way to accomplish the homeownership goal toward mixing income levels in the community.

#### **MORE AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Residents feel a strong need for more affordable housing, whether in public housing or in the surrounding community. Pre-Katrina the waiting list of individuals wanting to get apartments in public housing developments was approximately three years long. Some resident councils and resident management corporations have aspirations to acquire and develop housing in the areas immediately surrounding public housing communities. The Housing Authority of New Orleans already owns numerous parcels of land and buildings outside of public housing that could and should be developed as affordable rental units to help alleviate the long waiting list of people wanting public housing or affordable rental units.

#### **MORE WORKFORCE SOFT SKILLS AND HARD SKILLS TRAINING**

Residents point to increased tuition costs at Delgado Community College and other technical schools and colleges in the area. They feel a need for programs that address the soft skills necessary to get living wage jobs as well as specific hard skills training in job sectors that have become prevalent in the New Orleans area post-Katrina.

#### **MORE YOUTH PROGRAMS**

Residents feel a need for more educational and recreational programs geared to public housing youth. NORO, (New Orleans Recreation Department) is insufficient to address their needs. The population of residents seventeen years of age and under is the largest grouping in public housing. Many of the problems that have negatively affected public housing,



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pre-Katrina and post-Katrina, are due to the lack of positive outlets for young people to expend their energies, so they get bored and tend to find or make their own outlets, many of which tend to be socially unacceptable. Programs that help young people excel in school, learn new skills, use their creativity, and expend energy through sports are vitally necessary to help public housing developments decrease the incidence of juvenile mischief and crime.

#### **TECHNOLOGY CENTERS IN EACH HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

Our society has become increasingly high tech. Too many public housing residents have been left behind with it comes to computer literacy. To help resolve this problem, there needs to be at least one computer technology lab in each public housing development. Both young and elderly residents alike should be encouraged to learn and eventually own their own computers. In the meantime, a computer lab could serve to help close the digital divide for public housing residents.

#### **OPEN ALL PUBLIC HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS IMMEDIATELY SO RESIDENTS CAN RETURN HOME.**

Residents contend that they were illegally locked out of their apartments and should be allowed to return home immediately. The developments did not sustain enough damage from Hurricane Katrina to warrant closing them and locking residents out. A suit was filed in Federal District Court on behalf of residents by the NAACP. One contention of the suit is that HANO violated legal leases of residents and consequently, the rights of residents to return to their homes. This writer, accompanied by David Dixon and Barry Marks toured the Desire Development and witnessed eviction notices tacked to the doors of houses to which the tenants had never returned. The notices indicated a date on which the tenant was to be present in court to answer the rule for possession of the apartment. Certainly this is a circumvention of due process, since service upon the tenant was never made.

#### **MORE COMMUNITY POLICING PROVIDED BY HANO AND NOPD.**

Pre-Katrina, the COPS Units stationed in public housing developments did a good job of curbing crime. These units need to be reinstated in the developments and more officers assigned to them. The number of HANO security officers needs to be increased to supplement and assist the NOPD officers.

#### **ENFORCEMENT OF THE NO TRESPASSING LAW IN PUBLIC HOUSING.**

Much of the crime that occurs in public housing communities is the result of trespassers who come on the properties to commit their crimes. The residents are blamed for the crimes of those who don't live in public housing. HANO has a rule of no trespassing in all of the developments, but the rule is not enforced. Though some residents will not like it, all residents should have and carry ID badges to be identified as residents of the development. This would help decrease the incidence of crimes committed on public housing properties.

#### **ENFORCEMENT OF MAINTENANCE RULES BY HANO EMPLOYEES AND RESIDENTS**

Some of the problems in public housing come from disregard for the rules designed to help maintain the properties. Residents should be forced to do routine maintenance, such as proper disposal of garbage and trash, keeping hallways uncluttered and apartments clean, and reporting larger maintenance problems to HANO in a timely manner. HANO needs to respond to such requests and maintenance needs more quickly. Reserve funds for maintenance should be kept only for that purpose so when maintenance needs to be done the funds will be available.

#### **BETTER SCREENING OF NEW RESIDENTS**

Many of the problems of public housing can also be alleviated if new residents are screened before being allowed to rent units. Market rental units require a police background check, credit check, and sometimes a drug test before a prospective tenant is allowed to rent a unit. Because of the nature of public housing, there is greater need to screen new residents in the same ways as many market rental providers.

## Funding Strategies for the Unified New Orleans Plan

Dr. William Hyatt Gordon

### Introduction

We recommend that the Unified New Orleans Plan utilize a variety of public and private funding strategies to achieve its goals. A number of Recovery Planning Projects could be implemented through the direct investment of commercial development dollars into public infrastructure in return for long-term tax abatements. Of the commercial development tax abatements programs, Standard and Priority Zones would be established. Standard and Priority Commercial Tax Abatement programs will “dove-tail” with the existing Gulf Opportunity Zone Bond program (GO Zone). We recommend a new Katrina Emergency Bond Fund that would combine state and municipal resources to offset redevelopment costs for public benefit programs by providing substantial income tax reductions for investors including tax credits for the first and subsequent years. The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) will be able to issue an RTA – Redevelopment Bond with special tax features.

State agency participation will include for example, the Louisiana State Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism; the Louisiana State Department of Transportation and Development; and the Louisiana State University. Federal agency participation will include: the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the United States Department of Transportation (DOT), the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the United States Treasury - the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, the United States Treasury – Internal Revenue Service (IRS); the United States Federal Reserve System, the United States Corps of Engineers, the United States – Veterans Affairs, and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – Hope VI Program.

Not-for-profit organizations that provide community support would include, for example, the YMCA/ YWCA, the Jewish Community Center, Boys and Girls Clubs, parochial schools, as well as not-for-profit arts centers that would be incorporated into interim schools with marginal buildings in need of rehab and improvements and sold to these groups. We recommend that District 4 be designated as a priority Community Redevelopment/ Development Zone as far as United States banking participation is concerned under a temporary adjustment to the Community Reinvestment Act. Thus, any Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) member bank will be able to participate in the Community Redevelopment/Development Program, and receive Community Reinvestment Act credit within their home constituencies for a period of up to five (5) years from a designated effective date. In certain instances equity/debt pipeline lease-back structures are feasible, particularly for acute care and hospital development programs.

### Katrina Emergency Bond Fund

The Katrina Emergency Bond Fund will be provided for the City of New Orleans with the State of Louisiana’s utilization for redevelopment of public benefit projects solely within the City of New Orleans. The Katrina Emergency Bond will be appealing to national private and institutional investors because the bond will provide an income tax credit equivalent to purchase price during the first-year and tax-free interest in subsequent years as well as offer a “do the right thing” opportunity to directly help the citizens of New Orleans with their dollars. The Katrina Emergency Bond will be distributed through retail investment outlets nationwide. The difference between the Katrina Emergency Bond Fund program and the Gulf Opportunity Zone Bonds is that the Katrina Emergency Bond Fund specifically address public benefit projects and is a solution to funding gaps and budget government budget constraints. The Katrina Emergency Bond Fund will be utilized for

a wide variety of Recovery Planning Projects under the Unified New Orleans Plan. In some instances, the Katrina Emergency Bond Fund will be utilized to provide for long-term requirements after initial stabilization by the United States – Federal Emergency Management Agency. In other cases, the vast majority of the projects will be paid for out of the Katrina Emergency Bond Fund. In other instances program combinations may include utilization of the Katrina Emergency Bond Fund in conjunction with the Commercial Development Tax Abatement Program.

Katrina Emergency Bond Fund – FEMA projects:

- Pumping stations
- Community resource programs
- Interim resource programs

Katrina Emergency Bond Fund – Commercial Development Tax Abatement:

- St. Bernard Commercial Corridor
- Tulane Avenue Commercial Corridor
- Broad Street Commercial Corridor
- North Claiborne Commercial Corridor
- Canal Street Commercial Corridor
- Earhart Boulevard
- Lafitte Corridor
- Galvez Street Commercial Corridor
- Improve Armstrong Park
- Redevelop Blue Plate Node

Katrina Emergency Bond Fund (stand alone)

- Fund Study and possible I-10 removal
- Develop LSU / VA Regional Medical Center
- Connections between Zion City and Gert Town
- District-wide Street and Infrastructure repair
- Bayou Road / Governor Nicholls Cultural Corridor
- Iberville, B.W. Cooper, St. Bernard, Lafitte
- Home Elevation Program
- New Open Spaces Connections
- Green Block and House Moving Program

### Standard and Priority Commercial Development Tax Abatement Program

A Standard and Priority Commercial Development Tax Abatement Program will allow commercial developers to absorb and include public infrastructure costs into development. A Standard and Priority Commercial Development Tax Abatement Program harmonizes well with the Gulf Opportunity Zone Bond program. As a “pass-through” vehicle, existing benefits provided by the Gulf Opportunity Zone Bond will be applied to infrastructure redevelopment. This program will include sidewalk frontage, nearby parks, and other public property surrounding commercial development. In return, commercial developers will receive long-term tax abatements, which will directly offset first costs into public infrastructure, as well as provide development income benefit. The program recognizes that recovery absorption rates will likely be off-set or compounded by regional economic revitalization. Hence, the program provides for Standard and Priority Commercial Development Tax Abatement. While the Standard Commercial Development Tax Abatement Program is specifically designed for desired commercial zones; a priority program could provide greater tax benefits. Separating Commercial Development Tax Abatement Zones into Standard and Priority areas will create a natural absorption flow that will closely match regional economic reality. Yet, priority areas will receive additional attention due to the higher tax abatements provided for commercial development in these areas.

Standard Commercial Development Tax Abatement zones include the North Claiborne Avenue Area, St. Bernard Avenue Area, Broad Street Corridor, Earhart Boulevard, Zion City – Booker T. Washington – B.W. Cooper and Galvez Street Corridor. Priority Commercial Development Tax Abatement zones include Louis Armstrong Park Area Tulane Avenue Area Blue Plate Node (Earhart/Washington Street/Jeff Davis) Canal Street Area Lafitte Corridor – LIFT and the Industrial Park Zone in Gert Town and Zion City.

### United States Department of Housing and Urban Development – Hope VI Program

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development – Hope VI Program will be the basis of fundamental housing development. However affected public housing areas will be reinforced with Priority Commercial Development Tax Abatement Zones. The end goal will be a “town center,” approach to rethinking affordable and rental housing within the city including at Iberville, St. Bernard, Lafitte, as well as the B.W. Cooper Housing and adjacent areas. New programs will be designed to develop equity in development through the use of municipal, state, and federal office tenants in Priority Commercial Development Tax Abatement Zones.

### Louisiana State Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

We recommend that the Louisiana State Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism implement a statewide Green Spaces Program similar to the Iowa – Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Program for municipalities affected by Katrina and Rita. A City Parks and Open Space Program composed of fifteen percent (15%) of REAP funds is allocated to cities through competitive grants. Three (3) city-size categories have been established to assure grants are distributed to all sizes of cities. The categories are cities with populations: less than 2,000, from 2,000 to 25,000 and greater than 25,000. Annual grant amount ceilings are also in effect based on size of cities to help assure that funds are distributed for projects located throughout the state. These grants are one hundred percent (100%) funded, so local matching funds are not required. This grant program is very competitive. Funds are not available for single or multipurpose athletic fields, baseball or softball diamonds, tennis courts, golf courses and other organized sport facilities. Swimming pools and playground equipment are also ineligible. Parkland expansion and multi-purpose recreation developments

are typical projects funded under this REAP program. The DNR administers the city grant program. City officials appointed by the director of the DNR help select projects for funding. In this case the Louisiana Green Spaces Program would be primarily responsible for the distribution of grants, planning strategy funds, as well as pilot programs for New Open Spaces solutions like the Green Block and Housing Moving Project proposed for District 4. The Louisiana State Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism will be primarily responsible for the distribution of funds related to the planning of projects like the Bayou Road/Governor Nichols Cultural Corridor, Louis Armstrong Park and the Lafitte Greenway.

### Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Redevelopment Bond – Louisiana State Department of Transportation and Development/United States Department of Transportation

The Regional Transit Authority will be able to issue its own special Redevelopment Bond for RTA-related projects. The RTA – Redevelopment Bond will also carry tax features, such as tax-free interest, as well as direct tax credit for investment. The RTA – Redevelopment Bond will be utilized to improve RTA bus service, as well as provide for a feasibility study to extend street car lines, for example to Xavier University and possible light rail service. All RTA programs will be monitored by the Louisiana State Department of Transportation and Development, as well as the United States Department of Transportation. The Louisiana State Department of Transportation and Development will provide through its own budget compensation for state-related, but not local requirements. Likewise, transportation improvements overseen by the United States Department of Transportation will provide funding for federal requirements, or portions thereof, beyond the cost of state and local requirements. Budget allocations will include studies to satisfy state and federal requirements at the appropriate level. Likewise, the Louisiana State Department of Transportation and Development will be responsible for studies related to the impact of for

example the Recovery Planning Project to decommission two miles of Interstate-10 in the Treme neighborhood. The United States Department of Transportation will be responsible for studies related to the decommissioning of the Interstate-10 on the nation, but not on the state, or the City. Should the decommissioning of Interstate-10 commence, the costs of the project including the disassembly of on-ramps and aerials will be provided on a tripartite basis including municipal, state and federal funding.

### Community Development/Redevelopment Program – Community Reinvestment Act Credit

United States Federal Reserve Community Reinvestment Act requirements could be expanded so that every FDIC bank can get the home constituency credit for their participation in the Community Development/Redevelopment Program in the New Orleans region for a five (5) year term based on a proposed effective date. Hence, the nation’s banking community can absorb the Community Development/Redevelopment cost, as opposed to banks in one geographic area of the United States. United States Community Reinvestment Act credit for FDIC bank participation in the Community Development/Redevelopment program will more evenly distribute necessary funding for these fragile development areas on a national basis. Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation banks will greatly expedite the redevelopment effort in fragile housing zones, as well as Commercial Development Tax Abatement Programs.

### Interim Use Strategies for Public Facilities/Schools

Public facilities and schools that are not in use will be redistributed to not-for-profit organizations with community programs. These not-for-profit organizations can be Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA/YWCA, parochial schools/parochial community centers, Jewish Community Centers and the like. Special not-for-profit arts centers dedicated to dance, ballet, theatre

and fine arts could be programmed to accommodate several not-for-profits dedicated to a single subject under one roof. A magnet school dedicated to the arts, similar to Cincinnati, Ohio’s School for Creative and Performing Arts, will be established. Vacant, underutilized and damaged facilities will be sold to qualifying not-for-profit groups for adaptive reuse with an emphasis on organizations that provide large and varied community programs such as those of the YMCA.

### Acute Care/Healthcare Facility Equity/Debt Pipeline – Medical - Commercial Mortgage Back Securities (M-CMBS)

Acute care and healthcare facilities can be developed on a leased back basis through a combination of matching medical Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT(s)), equity providers, private equity groups, and equity funds with healthcare groups. Capital lending can be provided by banks on the primary market, but quickly sold to entities on the secondary market, which will package these acute care and healthcare-based mortgages into specially indexed Medical – Commercial Mortgage Backed Securities (M-CMBS). M-CMBS financial products will have unique interest rates and credit worthiness features that provide a low to medium-risk product on the bond market. These unique M-CMBS products will be available to public and private institutional as well as individual investors. Insurance companies, pension funds, mutual funds, fund of funds, and other securities trusts will find special value in medically-based CMBS products. If leased back acute care and healthcare facilities are “green” in design they will qualify for specific investment of socially conscious foundations, organizations and individuals independently or through mutual funds. This type of leased-back facility solution can be provided for the United States Veterans Affairs/Louisiana State University Medical Center or a public/private investment protocol can be utilized for the development of the facility.

## Neighborhood Planning Councils

Throughout the Unified New Orleans Plan process as well as other planning efforts post-Katrina, a strong community voice emerged that shaped decisions about rebuilding. However, there is currently no formalized institutional vehicle for bringing this voice to bear on public decision-making in New Orleans.

Many cities, such as New York, San Diego, Los Angeles and Portland, rely extensively on neighborhood councils and community boards in public decision-making processes. In New York, for example, the first step in any land development review process is a local Community Board, which is authorized to approve proposals or make recommendations for improvements. Neighborhood councils and community boards throughout the country are empowered to approve zoning amendments, negotiate community benefits agreements with private developers and participate in design review processes.

There needs to be an empowered role in New Orleans for neighborhood-level community input on public decisions about infrastructure, housing, open space, and the environment. Such a role can be just as powerful and informative as the role played by the City Planning Commission, the City Council and the Office of the Mayor.

Establishing Neighborhood Councils will also create broad benefits for the city and its residents, and help to ensure that a community voice will continue to shape planning decisions as the work of UNOP and other efforts are implemented. Neighborhood Councils will also build upon and strengthen the collaborative affinities that have developed since Hurricane Katrina among both neighborhoods and neighborhood organizations. Lastly, as New Orleans rebuilds, Neighborhood Councils will create for residents a powerful stake in and commitment to future decision-making about resource allocation and urban development.

*The following essay by Peter Brightbill, an attorney with expertise in zoning issues and community participation, outlines the salient features of the New York and San Diego community planning models for New Orleans. One possible approach for discussion and adoption, written by New Orleanian Keith Twitchell, offers a detailed “Model for Citizen Participation Program” that is supported by citizens and neighborhood associations.*

### Models for Neighborhood Planning Peter Brightbill

The devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina exposed both the fragility of New Orleans’ physical infrastructure as well as the vulnerability of the City’s process for planning its growth and development, most notably in the absence of an established mechanism for community and neighborhood involvement. Unlike many other cities, New Orleans has no formal mechanism by which community groups and neighborhoods can participate in the City’s planning and development process. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, many residents, mostly African-American, have been displaced to other cities, and many in other states. In their absence, the City’s demographics have changed radically. Many Hispanic families have moved in to provide physical labor for the rebuilding effort and real estate prices, even in poorer wards, have increased rapidly, fueled by speculation.

The culture that New Orleans is known for throughout the world is largely a product of its African-American and Creole citizens. Organizing this population (which has been historically politically disenfranchised and is now dispersed) to participate meaningfully in the redevelopment of their city will be the one of the key challenges facing City officials and planners. This will make the difference in whether New Orleans will continue to be a vibrant and unique city that celebrates its root cultures or, instead, a theme-park version of a no-longer-living heritage. Community-participation mechanisms in New York and San Diego can provide some guidance

as to how New Orleans can ensure that its redevelopment will remain rooted in that City’s particular blend of cultures.

### New Orleans: Wards, Districts, Krewes and Benevolent Societies

The original City of New Orleans was comprised of what are now the 1st through 9th wards. The City of Lafayette (including the Garden District) was added in 1852 as the 10th and 11th wards. In 1870, Jefferson City, including Faubourg Boulogny and much of the Audubon and University areas, was annexed as the 12th, 13th and 14th wards. Algiers, on the West Bank of the Mississippi, was also annexed in 1870, becoming the 15th ward. Four years later, Orleans Parish ceased being separate from the city of New Orleans when the city of Carrollton was annexed as the 16th and 17th wards.

Presently, planning is largely the provenance of the New Orleans City Planning Commission, with oversight and approval power in the hands of the New Orleans City Council. Under various city charters of the 19th-century, aldermen and later city council members were elected by ward. However, since a charter revision in 1912, the city has not had officials elected to represent any of its wards. Instead, the seventeen wards have been consolidated into five council districts. These districts only loosely conform to the boundaries of traditional New Orleans neighborhoods. The city council presently consists of five council members who are elected by district and two at-large council members.

In addition to its formal council structure of districts and historic wards, there are other sets of community organizations. Perhaps the most prominent of these, and certainly unique to New Orleans, are the Mardi Gras krewes and the benevolent societies (also known as Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs). The krewes, originally drawn from the wealthier white populations, were first organized in the mid-19th century to hold masked balls and parades during the

Mardi Gras Carnival season. At about the same time, African-Americans, initially excluded from the Mardi Gras celebrations, formed “social aid and pleasure societies” which served as social centers, insurance co-ops, and community anchors for their neighborhoods. One of the oldest clubs, Zulu, started parading in the same manner as the krewes. Other clubs paraded around the poor neighborhoods. These parades were unannounced and the routes were known to only a few insiders. Over time, the two traditions merged, until today there are over 41 krewes chartered and organized to participate in New Orleans’ Mardi Gras celebrations, some of which, like Zulu, were originally founded as social aid and pleasure clubs.

### New York Community Planning Board Model

The role of community boards in New York City planning dates back to the early 1950s, when the first twelve Community Planning Councils, later known as Community Planning Boards, were established in Manhattan. The Manhattan planning councils were the City’s first formal mechanism for participation by neighborhood groups in city planning and budgetary matters. The other borough presidents soon created similar groups.

In the late 1960s, the city was divided into 62 community districts and the role of community boards as advisors to the city government was statutorily established. Each board was given the responsibility for advising the City Planning Commission on “any matter relating to the development or welfare of its district.” In 1968, the City Charter was repealed and reenacted. The new law spelled out in greater detail the structure and power of the now renamed Community Boards. Under the existing law the City Council is required to (a) refer to the community boards all matters requiring public hearings by furnishing their calendars or notices of meeting to the board chairman; (b) note in their records the recommendations of community boards made at public hearings and the failure of community boards to make recommen-

dations; (c) notify the community boards of actions taken subsequent to public hearings; and (d) give the community boards such information necessary for their work which they shall require.

New York City is divided into 59 Community Districts, each represented by a Community Board with up to 50 members who live or work within the district. Community boards are considered autonomous City agencies and the board members are considered City officers. Board members, who serve without pay, are appointed by the Borough President. City Council members nominate at least half of the appointees (divided proportionally based on the share of the district's population represented by each Council member). Board members must reside, work or have some other significant interest in the community. Members serve staggered two-year terms; half of the membership is appointed every year – not more than 25% of the appointed members can be City employees. Each Board is allotted a budget to be used to hire a small staff (district managers, assistant managers, community liaisons).

Over time, the community boards have gained stature as effective vehicles for the expression of local views on a wide variety of public issues, especially those related to land use. Since 1976, the role of the community boards has been statutorily prescribed by the City's Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP), which sets forth a standardized procedure whereby applications affecting the land use of the city are publicly reviewed. ULURP establishes a strict timeline from the filing of a land use review application with the Department of City Planning, to hearing and comment periods by the affected Borough Presidents, Community Boards and the City Planning Commission, to final hearings and vote before the City Council. Mayoral approval is not required. A decision by the City Council to approve or disapprove a land use application is considered to be final unless the Mayor elects to veto a Council action. The Council, by a two-thirds vote, can override the Mayor's veto of its decision.

### San Diego Community Planning Model

There has been long-standing citizen involvement in the City of San Diego's planning process dating back to the mid-1960s. During the 1960s and 1970s, the San Diego City Council adopted policies that established and recognized community planning groups as formal mechanisms for community input in the decision-making regarding development projects, general or community plan amendments, rezoning and public facilities. Under the San Diego system, citizens who want to participate in the planning process are able to form "officially-recognized" planning groups. The City Council recognizes one official planning group in each community. Groups work with city staff to formulate and implement the General Plan and community plans, and to advise the Planning Commission and City Council on projects.

The City of San Diego recognizes 58 communities and community sub-areas. All but a handful of these have Community Planning Groups (CPGs), the legal status of which is recognized by the San Diego City Council. Each CPG, which consists of neighborhood residents together with staff planners who are employees of the City Planning Department, is responsible for putting together a Community Plan, the chair of each community planning group is also be the group's representative at the Community Planners Committee (CPC). CPC meetings, which are held monthly, include presentations by City Planning Department staff and other speakers on topics of interest to the CPC. The meetings are an opportunity to network with other community leaders and discuss important policy or development issues with Planning Department staff. Positions taken by CPC about important issues provide a key link with decision-makers at City Hall and in the various City Departments. In addition, the CPC has formed subcommittees to review various issues in depth, and has made recommendations of great value.

Unlike the New York City model, in San Diego the CPGs are considered private organizations and the

planning group members are not considered to be public officials. As such, California's Fair Political Practices Act and conflict-of-interest provisions are not applicable. Instead, the City Council has drafted administrative guidelines, which, among other things, set forth the circumstances under which a community group member should recuse himself or herself and mandate that meetings be open to the public. A CPG that fails to follow the administrative guidelines can have its official recognition removed by the City Council.

The community plan itself does not control development in the community but must, instead, be implemented through zoning regulations in the land development code, the capital improvements program, a public facilities financing plan and monitoring of projects. All the community plans combined constitute the Land Use Element of the General Plan of the City of San Diego.

**Establishing Neighborhood Councils will create broad benefits for the city and its residents, and help to ensure that a community voice will continue to shape planning decisions as the work of UNOP and other efforts are implemented. Neighborhood Councils will also build upon and strengthen the collaborative affinities that have developed since Hurricane Katrina among both neighborhoods and neighborhood organizations.**

## Model for Citizen Participation Program

Committee for a Better New Orleans/Metropolitan Area Committee

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Citizen Participation Program (CPP) is to allow citizens to have a greater say in city government decision-making and priority setting, and to give government officials an effective means for communicating with the people. The CPP will provide an additional tool for citizens and city officials to communicate with each other and work together. Ultimately, the CPP is a vehicle for each individual citizen to have a direct impact on the policies and actions of city government.

### Structure

The CPP will have a three-tiered structure, with Neighborhood Councils (NC), Community Councils comprised of representatives from the Neighborhood Councils, and a citywide Citizen's Voice Council comprised of representatives from each Community Council.

### Neighborhood Councils

Existing neighborhood associations will form the basis of the Neighborhood Council tier. In areas where no viable neighborhood association presently exists, the two preferred options are to expand existing neighborhood associations to include such areas, or to establish new Neighborhood Councils. In areas where association boundaries overlap, an attempt will be made to negotiate new, non-overlapping boundaries. In a few places, very small adjacent neighborhood associations will be asked to consider merging. Ultimately, a full city map that indicates the accepted boundaries for all the Neighborhood Councils will be prepared and kept updated.

Neighborhood Councils will be nonprofit organizations, with monthly meetings, and will establish their own bylaws, although they must conform with a few guidelines that will be standard throughout the CPP (see Membership below). They will elect their own officers, board members and representatives to the Community Councils. Officers and board members will be required to attend a CPP training session. Officers and board members will be held accountable for their Neighborhood Councils in the following areas:

- NC must follow their own bylaws.
- NC must follow CPP guidelines.
- NC shall be subject to normal public meeting laws.
- NC must demonstrate legitimate neighborhood participation in meetings and decision-making.
- NC must demonstrate that they have taken significant outreach efforts in order to ensure that they are legitimately representative of a neighborhood, as reflected in their membership.

Neighborhood Councils will receive logistical and other support from staff at the Community Council level. They will not receive regular funding through the CPP; although some funds may be available through the Community Councils (see Funding).

### Community Councils

Approximately seven to ten Community Councils will be established by general region of the city (i.e., Lakeview, Lower Ninth, Gentilly, etc.). Every Neighborhood Council within the region of a particular Community Council will send one representative to the Community Council. Uniform bylaws will be set for all the Community Councils, which will also be nonprofit organizations, and they will elect their own officers and representatives to the citywide Citizen's Voice Council. They will be able to set up committees on issues as they see fit. They will meet every other month.

The Community Councils will be the chief conduit for information to and from city government and the CPP. Therefore, a major role of the Community Council will be to feed information, accurately and promptly, to the Neighborhood Councils, and conversely, to gather input from the Neighborhood Councils to convey to city

government. In addition, when the city wishes or is required to hold public input meetings, city departments and agencies will partner with the Community Councils to organize, publicize and conduct such meetings. Community Councils will also serve as arbitrators among Neighborhood Councils in their area, and should be the environment for resolving any disputes between or within Neighborhood Councils.

The Community Councils will have a small staff, including an Executive Director, who will be hired by each Council. The Executive Director will conduct the meetings, although he/she will not have voting rights. Staff members will be required to complete specific CPP training. Staff qualifications will include conflict resolution, facilitation skills, organizational skills, communications skills, and experience in community organizations and activism. Staff responsibilities will include supporting the Neighborhood Councils within their area, maintaining communication with city government, and maintaining a high level of organization within the CPP structure. Staff members will frequently attend Neighborhood Council meetings, and do presentations on various issues and questions facing the neighborhoods; they will also help arrange for city officials to speak at meetings. They will work with the Neighborhood Councils on outreach, communications, organizational issues, programs, and some training and fundraising. Staff will also compile an annual report for each Community Council.

### Citizen's Voice Council

This body shall consist of two representatives from each Community Council. It will meet at least once per year, with provisions for calling additional meetings. The annual meeting will be attended by the Mayor and City Council, along with other top officials such as department heads.

The Citizen's Voice Council will be a nonprofit organization. Its bylaws will be established through the CPP process. It will elect its own officers. The overall Director of the CPP will be responsible for organizational matters related to the Citizen's Voice Council (see Administration below).

The Citizen's Voice Council will replace the Master Plan Advisory Council.

### Membership

Participation in the CPP is free to all qualified citizens aged 16 or older. Neighborhood Councils may ask for voluntary membership dues, but are not be allowed to charge mandatory dues.

Membership in the Neighborhood Councils shall be available to:

- Residents of the neighborhood
- Property owners in the neighborhood
- Owners of businesses in the neighborhood
- People who work in the neighborhood; however, they will be non-voting members
- Representatives from institutions in the neighborhood, such as schools, churches, etc.; however, they will be non-voting members

Individuals will have to provide some acceptable proof of meeting one or more of the above membership requirements. All members of a Neighborhood Council, except as noted above, will have full voting rights. A uniform document of participants' rights and responsibilities will be prepared for use throughout the CPP.

### Funding

Funding for the CPP will come from a variety of sources; however, the primary source will be the City of New Orleans. The funds will come from a dedicated source; possible CPP funding sources include a property tax millage or an annual assessment on Sewerage and Water Board bills. The funding source must not be a part of the annual budget and therefore subject to review and renewal each fiscal year.

Funding through the CPP will be primarily directed to the Community Councils. They in turn may use funds to support the Neighborhood Councils, for programs, outreach, communications, etc. They may also offer certain "grants" for special projects to the Neighborhood Councils. Community Councils must prepare annual budgets, which will be approved by the Council members and the CPP Executive Administrator. As nonprofit organizations, both the Neighborhood Councils and the Community Councils are free to seek

grants. Corporations, foundations, the government, and individuals may be solicited for funding; however, grants to any entity within the CPP must be free of any potential conflict with the core mission of the CPP. Community Councils are allowed to bid on certain government contracts that are congruent with their work; examples might include citizen trainings, communications projects, citizen organization projects, etc.

In addition, the overall CPP Administrator may seek grants and other funding for the Program, again with the restriction that any such funding must be free of potential conflicts.

#### **Administration**

The CPP will be overseen by a full-time Executive Administrator. This person, and his/her office, shall be a distinct department within New Orleans city government. The Council of University Presidents will nominate three individuals for this position; the Mayor will then select one nominee, and the choice will be confirmed by the City Council, by a simple majority vote. In order to remove the Executive Administrator from his/her post, the Mayor will have to submit a recommendation to terminate to the City Council, which must pass the recommendation with a minimum of five votes.

The Executive Administrator and CPP office will be responsible for overall administration of the CPP, including matters such as insurance, legislative issues, development of staff and volunteer training programs, overall organization and operations. The Executive Directors of the Community Councils will meet regularly with the Executive Administrator. Community Councils may also request meetings with the Executive Administrator at any time; such requests shall be honored promptly.

Neighborhood Councils will have minimal direct interaction with the Executive Administrator and CPP office, excepting that a procedure shall be developed for addressing grievances between a Neighborhood Council and its Community Council.

Overall, the CPP must be kept as independent from city government and city politics as possible, while maintaining a strong and formal link to government policy-setting and operations.

#### **Mandate/Legal Status**

The Citizen Participation Program shall be codified in a legal document, and shall be formally adopted as part of the New Orleans City Charter.

All tiers of the CPP have the right to address any issues facing the city, as long as there is some clear tie to their geographic area. The primary focus, especially at the Neighborhood Council, will be livability and quality of life issues.

Specifically, all zoning and land use issues, including all development or redevelopment plans, that impact a neighborhood shall be brought to the Neighborhood Council(s) impacted by such issues. This shall include land uses permitted by zoning, especially if they involve new construction. A mechanism will be constructed through which such issues are brought to the Neighborhood Councils for formal review, with established routing and time frames. Information presented to the Neighborhood Councils shall be warranted to be comprehensive and accurate; violations of this policy shall be cause for overturning any future permits and approvals. This review by the Neighborhood Councils shall occur before any such issues or plans are brought before the City Planning Commission or City Council, and any permits are issued. As part of this mechanism, thorough and valid notification processes shall be developed. The developer or city agency pursuing the issue or development shall bear full responsibility for the notification process; and proof that notification was made, and that the Neighborhood Council review took place (including official meeting minutes), or that the Neighborhood Council declined to make such review, shall be required before any permits may be issued or approvals granted.

Decisions brought forth from the Neighborhood Councils shall, at every further step of the formal review process (i.e., City Planning Commission, Safety and Permits, City Council), be considered "rebuttable decisions", meaning that if a city government entity acts in opposition to a decision of the Neighborhood

Council, the rationale for such decision shall be presented in writing to the Neighborhood Council(s) from which the original decision emanated. Furthermore, in such cases, a thirty-day period shall be established before such decisions can go into effect, during which time the Neighborhood Councils shall have the right to pursue any other avenue of recourse. To facilitate this, a formal appeal process should be established and codified in the CPP legislation.

Similarly, any city department or agency contemplating major policy moves or activities shall be required to notify the Community Council(s) for the geographic areas impacted by their actions, which will often require notification of all the Community Councils; they in turn will notify the Neighborhood Councils, who will discuss and, if so desired, vote on any recommendation. Such notice shall be provided no less than 45 days prior to making a final decision on the proposed action (to accommodate the monthly meeting schedule of the Neighborhood Councils). Neighborhood Councils will have the right to respond in writing to any departmental/agency proposals. If the proposed action is taken over the objections of a Neighborhood Council or Councils, the department or agency shall be required to provide a written rationale for why it took the action in the face of the objection, in the process countering the objection.

Additionally, the Neighborhood and Community Councils shall have the right to raise issues of concern to them and have their concerns brought before the appropriate city government entities. Among the specific issues that the CPP may address include:

- Transportation/parking
- Access
- Neighborhood character
- Public safety
- Crime
- Trash
- Zoning
- Economic impact of a proposal
- Environmental issues
- Hazardous materials
- Neighborhood infrastructure
- Education
- The direction and use of tax revenues, especially those generated within a neighborhood
- City budget priorities

All city department heads shall be required to document any communications sent to and received from the CPP, and their responses to CPP input and decisions. Such documentation will be presented as part of the annual departmental budget process.

In addition, approval for all future elements of the Master Plan, and mandatory reviews of the individual elements of the Master Plan, shall go through the Community Councils of the CPP, and all official public input meetings for all city government departments and agencies shall be organized in partnership with the Community Councils. Review of the city's Five-Year Plan shall likewise be conducted through the CPP.

The CPP shall conduct an annual need and resources audit. Every Neighborhood Council will participate in this audit, which will be directed by the Executive Administrator and CPP office. The results of this audit will be presented to the Mayor and City Council in due time for consideration in the city's annual budgetary process. As part of this process, the CPP should develop a "community scorecard" for use by the Neighborhood and Community Councils. Also, individual Neighborhood Councils will be encouraged to develop neighborhood plans, and shall be supported by the CPP and other government agencies in any legitimate effort to do so.