URBAN PLANNING COMMITTEE: ACTION PLAN FOR NEW ORLEANS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January 30, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Background

The City of New Orleans will be different in the future. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita changed a great deal. The charge of the Urban Planning Committee of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission has been to recommend a plan of action to address the physical future of the city of New Orleans. The Plan must answer the question: How will the city evolve from disaster to a bigger and better city in the long term? While necessarily our focus is on the short-term of the next two and one half to three years, we are mindful that every action must set the stage for a sustainable city in the future.

We are inspired by President Bush's September 15th statement in Jackson Square:

> *I also offer this pledge of the American people: throughout the area hit by the hurricane, we will do what it takes, we will stay as long as it takes, to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives. 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.*

This is a promise of assistance, of whatever it takes, and a challenge to the Commission and the Urban Planning Committee to answer the questions of how the nation can help, and what the citizens of New Orleans must do to move forward.

Hurricane Katrina was a natural disaster. However, we know that what happened in August was not just an act of nature, but also multiple failures in the levee system. If not for those failures, flooding would have been minimal and it would have been short. In fact, what happened is that deep water stood over a long period of time in large areas of the city. Figure 1 documents the depth of floodwater in New Orleans. The extent of flooding is remarkable. The reds indicate areas with over 6 feet of flood water. The brown are areas with over 10 feet of flood water. These conditions persisted for weeks until the breaches were closed and the pumps removed the water. Deep standing water, particularly if it is brackish, is far more destructive than a short immersion. Approximately one-half of all New Orleans households had over four feet of floodwater. Only those areas that are green had less than two feet of water. Even as little as two feet of water can destroy machinery and electrical systems.

This is the largest disaster in national memory, probably in the history of the nation. Not only New Orleans, but an area of approximately 92,000 square miles – a little smaller than Great Britain – was affected. It is difficult to imagine the effect if this happened somewhere else. Figure 2 illustrates the coverage of only New Orleans flooding if it had happened in Washington, DC. The figure shows the outline area of Orleans flooding superimposed at the same scale on an aerial photograph of the District of Columbia. All of the downtown, including the White House and U.S. Capitol would have been under

water for weeks. Much of the remainder of the District as well as large portions of the suburban metropolitan area in Maryland and northern Virginia would also have remained under deep water.

Why Rebuild?

Some still ask: Why should we rebuild? Part of the answer lies in the wisdom of previous generations. Unlike any other part of the gulf region, stretching from the state of Florida on the east through Texas on the west, only the New Orleans area has been protected by a levee system. Clearly it is imperative to protect this extraordinarily valuable asset. It is valuable in many ways.

New Orleans' national economic importance includes hundreds of billions of dollars in real estate assets, plus petrochemical and other industries. The importance of the area's petrochemical and natural gas industries were demonstrated by the price spikes in anticipation of and after the hurricane. It includes one of the largest port operations in the country that moves much of the grain produced by the United States' bread basket, as well as industrial and other products, to world markets. It is a major import hub as well. The delta region is a productive fishery that supplies many restaurants in North America and abroad.

New Orleans is home to national and international rank educational, medical, health, and research institutions. The city has a unique concentration of 19 National Register Historic Districts and over 38,000 properties, 25,000 of which suffered flood damage. New Orleans is internationally celebrated for its culture, its music and creative arts, as well as the arts of living.

Other great places have been through this process and come back better than before. After San Francisco was flattened by earthquake and burned, it came back. It still is located on an active fault. After its fire, Chicago came back, as did Florence after its flood. The entire country of Holland offers an example to the world. Great cities come back better than before.

Where Are People Now?

Still, many residents have not been able to return. Figure 3 shows the diaspora of displaced New Orleans citizens across the United States. The size of the dots indicates the number of people. Those who have been displaced are not just in the south and the southeast, but in the four corners of the country with deep personal and financial impacts for these citizens and for their hosts.

Estimates prepared by the RAND Corporation in consultation with GRC indicate that there may be close to 150,000 people back in January 2006. They estimate that by September 2006, the start of the next school season, there may be approximately 181,000 people back in the city. They further estimate a September 2008 population – a little over two and one-half years from now – of approximately two hundred forty-seven thousand people. These estimates are based on national and international experience and estimates of the speed with which damaged homes can be repaired and

made habitable. It is important to understand that the lack of housing is now the biggest constraint to people moving back. People who have jobs have trouble finding places to live. Employers with openings have trouble finding employees with a place to live close enough to permit them to accept the job.

The Vision

The Committee gave much thought to developing a vision of the new New Orleans, one based on the best of its legacy. The vision captures the spirit and aspirations of the members and participants:

> *New Orleans will be a sustainable, environmentally safe, socially equitable community with a vibrant economy.*
> *Its neighborhoods will be planned with its citizens and connect to jobs and the region. Each will preserve and celebrate its heritage of culture, landscape, and architecture.*

Therefore, the Committee did not consider rebuilding as a way to replace what was damaged, but as an opportunity to create the best city in the world - not just for people to return, but also to attract people from around the world to visit and live. This will be a city that is bigger and better than before, a city with:

- Downtown: vibrant and bustling with people who want to live, work, eat, shop, experience culture and art, bring their children, and stay. A downtown that remains the economic and cultural center of the region and, in fact, of much of the south.
- Neighborhoods: the heart of activity and services, celebrating their unique heritage and welcoming the new.
- Parks and open space: bringing sustainable nature into every neighborhood, linking every part of the city.
- Educational, technical, and medical institutions: employment powerhouses, supporting their neighborhoods and energizing the economy of the region.
- Connections: beautifully landscaped connections throughout the city and region for pedestrians, bicycles, cars, and transit.

Our Approach to Planning

The Committee's approach focused on two physical scales and time frames simultaneously. The charge was, literally, to create order out of chaos. We needed to address the immediate presenting problems of environmental safety and the provision of habitable houses. At the same time, we needed to create a comprehensive, city-wide framework for a long-term sustainable city that could only be New Orleans. The solutions to each issue had to be direct, efficient, and equitable, enhance citizens' quality of life, and create opportunities for future evolution of the community toward achievement of its vision. All these tasks needed to be accomplished without most of the hard data traditionally used in preparation of such plans, and in an extraordinarily compressed time – this was the gravest emergency imaginable.

An example of the Committee's approach to seemingly simple, traditional elements is the recommendation to provide parks and open space in every neighborhood. A simple

goal – although one not achieved pre-Katrina. The plan recommends this solution to the lack of local open space and proposes parks as a part of the city-wide public and green infrastructure that serves multiple functions:

- Recreation and outdoor social space
- Variety in the visual environment and relief from development
- Design reference to local history and culture
- Urban forest 'services" including carbon sequestering and CO2 conversion to oxygen, particulate capture, reduction of urban heat island effects, phyto-remediation of contaminated soils, wind amelioration, habitat creation
- Storm water management
- Connections through a city-wide network that serve movement, social, and habitat creation values

By serving these multiple functions, this one element of civic life can address direct current needs while building a better, more sustainable city in the long term. Every recommendation made was similarly evaluated in terms of its ability to solve immediate needs and move the city towards achievement of its vision.

The plan's focus on the physical means that it is concerned with shaping the daily experiences of citizens and visitors in New Orleans. As the physical scale changes from city-wide framework elements to the specifics of neighborhood structure, down to the design of specific structures and spaces, the impacts become more personal: where people live and work, what the experience of being there is like, who is encountered and in what place and context, how movement takes place and connections are established. All recommendations must contribute to every citizen's health, freedom, delight in the experience of life, and the pleasure of being part of a community.

CITY-WIDE FRAMEWORK FOR RECONSTRUCTION

To help achieve these aspirations for all its citizens, the Committee prepared a framework for reconstruction of the entire city. This was done with the understanding that, in the short term, there will be a considerably smaller population and reduced public revenues. Therefore, the plan must be responsible in two ways. First, it must use scarce public resources efficiently and equitably to benefit the most citizens. Second, it must not mislead citizens by making or implying promises regarding provision of public facilities and services that cannot be fulfilled.

There are four elements in this framework. The first three create the city-wide structure or skeleton that supports rebuilding of neighborhoods. The first has to do with safety: flood and storm water protection. The second has to do with connections and accessibility: transit and transportation. The third has to do with quality of life (attracting returning and new citizens): parks and open space. These three plans support the most critical action which is neighborhood rebuilding with its necessary public facilities and services.

Flood and Storm Water Protection Plan
New Orleans is not alone in its contest with floods and storms. They are challenges that have been met throughout the world, in Holland, Japan, and elsewhere. New Orleans' location on the Mississippi delta requires a specific approach in response to the characteristics of the enormous, but shrinking delta, subsiding soil, and location in an area of high hurricane probability. The Committee recommends a comprehensive system with multiple lines of defense to protect the city. These include perimeter levees around the city, pumping and floodgates, and internal levees with separate pumps that handle storm water. A most important part of the system is the restoration of regional costal wetlands to reduce storm surge.

The region approach is critical. Figure 4 illustrates the loss of wetlands predicted between the years 2000 and 2050. We have outlined the greatest concentrations of predicted loss, the small red dots, in red and highlighted the city in the center of the map. The best estimate now is that one hundred percent of the New Orleans area projected 2050 wetland loss occurred last year. This is a sobering, in fact terrifying, number.

Challenges so large require a superbly organized response. However, there are now multiple levee districts in the region. The Committee recommends creation of a single levee district. The Committee further recommends that the Corps of Engineers be responsible for funding, building, operating, and maintaining regional levees and pumping systems. These responsibilities must be carried out under the oversight of an independent entity that is led and staffed by qualified and experienced professionals.

The Flood and Storm Water Protection Plan diagram (Figure 5) presents the lines of defense from flood and storm water. The thick lines show the major levees and flood walls. These are located along Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River. Minor levees are shown in a thinner line, east of the Industrial Canal on both sides of the Intracoastal Waterway. The Committee recommends relocation of the canal pumps away from the center of the city to the lake, so the canals no longer can become the Trojan horses that allow storm surges into the heart of the city as happened with Hurricane Katrina. Moving the pumps to the lake and protecting them and the canals will provide an entirely different level of security.

We recommend that the Industrial Canal be closed at the lakefront because commercial boat traffic does not need that access. We recommend also that the Industrial Canal locks be completed to provide another line of defense. The Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, which provided deadly access for the storm surge during Katrina, must be closed at both ends.

Another line of defense is a series of internal levees, similar to the Dutch plodder system, shown by dashed lines on the figure. This has more to do with managing storm water than floods. New Orleans' frequent torrential rains can cause tremendous quality of life and financial difficulties as the pump system is currently not designed to handle them city-wide. The internal levee system takes advantage of existing places where

there is high ground, for example railroad embankments and roads, that are elevated even as little as a foot or two above surrounding areas. These, when completed to form self-contained 'cells', can isolate storm water and permit it to be removed with a dedicated pumping systems for each.

All these systems must be supported by regional coastal wetland restoration. These areas are the city's first line of defense. Coastal wetlands reduce the height of storm surges and provide important habitat. The considerable thought and study that have previously been devoted to this system should be used as the basis for restoration planning. Much of that coastal protection was lost in 2005. It must be brought back throughout the region as rapidly as possible.

The Committee recommends specific actions to help the city and its citizens defend themselves from floods and storms in the short term. FEMA must release the advisory Base Flood Elevation maps within thirty days at the latest, and the final maps as soon as possible. These will provide important information to allow residents to make informed individual decisions about their homes. These decisions will be influenced by the reactions of the insurance and mortgage industries, reactions that are impossible to anticipate. Repairs to the flood protection breaches and temporary floodgates must be provided by the next hurricane season, in June of this year. We must move the pumps to the lake, and complete the design and fund the construction of the regional system, including costal wetland restoration to protect the city from a Category 5 hurricane. Closing the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet is imperative; it is a regional issue. The Industrial Canal lock system should be completed to address those weaknesses in the protection system.

In the longer term, as President Bush promised on December 15, 2005, a levee protection upgrade to provide a levee system "better and stronger than ever before" must be completed in 2007. In addition, the regional protection system must put it in place. Once the pumps and associated protection are moved to the lake, we will have the opportunity to reuse canal levees and canal edges as open space. We should replace canals with box culverts where appropriate. When we do this, we will have created a new open space resource in many parts of the city. While this happens, we must implement the internal levee system to manage storm water.

Transit and Transportation Plan

Transit and transportation provide connection throughout the city and to the region of which New Orleans is the capitol. Accessibility is essential to daily life and commerce.

The transit and transportation plan creates a city-wide high speed, light rail transit network that connects neighborhoods to neighborhoods, to downtown, and to other employment centers. The cars can look as historic or modern as desired, but they will make fewer stops and move faster than street cars so the service becomes more competitive with the automobile. We know from national experience that light rail creates value in real estate and neighborhoods, and is a catalyst for reconstruction and redevelopment. We recommend that the transit system serve the city and link to the

airport, Baton Rouge and west, and to the entire gulf coast of which New Orleans is the capitol. In addition, when new roads must be constructed they are designed with the neutral ground or the wide median system which provides space for pedestrians, bicycles, and transit as well as creating landscaped open space.

There are models for such a transit system; this is something that has been successful in many cities. Portland, Oregon is famous for its city-wide system and regional connections. This system serves the existing population, but more than that, the city is using the new lines to create incentives for investment and settlement. They are managing the growth of the city and the distribution of private investments through their transit system. The New Orleans proposal is not too aggressive. Denver Colorado, which already has two light rail lines in operation, now has five new light rail and commuter lines approved for implementation - proof of the value of this kind of connection. The Dallas system, while only partly constructed, already has much higher than expected use with new lines in planning and construction to respond to their popularity and to help the city manage growth and development.

The Committee's recommended system (Figure 6) builds on a great deal of previous work. There are regional lines and those within the city. The Committee recommends connecting the city to its region through commuter connections. These include heavier and faster trains to reinforce New Orleans' role as the economic and cultural heart of the region by doing the following: 1) connect the downtown to the airport and beyond to Baton Rouge, largely using existing rail lines, and 2), on the east, connect to Slidel along the lakefront, and out Chef Menteur Highway to the Mississippi Gulf Coast where the train can connect with that state's proposed system.

Within the city, we recommend a number of light rail lines be constructed, 53 new miles of service. Many of these have been studied and proposed before. We combine and add to these to create a network with stops that support concentrations of activity and investment. We recommend that the current Canal Street line be extended up Canal Boulevard through Lakeview toward the Lake with possible stops at commercial intersections such as Harrison.

The current St. Charles streetcar line should be extended up Carrolton to the Fairgrounds and then along Desaix and Gentilly to an intersection with a line that runs up Elysian Fields from an extended Riverfront trolley line to the University of New Orleans.

The Riverfront trolley should be completed in a loop extending upriver along the riverfront from the Industrial Canal to the Lower Garden District and then toward the Lake and back downriver passing by O. C. Haley Boulevard, Rampart Street and back to Bywater. A line following this route should extend along St. Claude Avenue and into the Lower 9th Ward. This line would serve residents going to and from their jobs as well as visitors circulating among the high density cultural and entertainment attractions in these parts of the city.

In addition, there is an opportunity to extend a line along the high ground of the Gentilly ridge across Chef Menteur Highway through New Orleans East. The Chef Highway's high ground location is one example of the multiple uses of existing elevated conditions as part of the internal levee and storm water management system.

We recommend that the Crescent City Connection, which was constructed with the strength and space to hold a light rail trolley in its HOV line, be activated by light rail coming across the bridge and down De Gaulle Drive in Algiers. This line would access large residential areas on the West Bank and those with the potential for more.

Light rail should be used to connect Claiborne Avenue to the Saint Charles line at Carrollton. Claiborne Avenue and this corner in particular, represent great potential for development and redevelopment of houses and businesses in the heart of the city.

Tulane Avenue serves the downtown Medical Center, which remains an economic engine. Provision of a light rail line along Tulane Avenue would connect it to the airport and Jefferson Parish, reinforcing its place in the region and stimulating investment at its stops.

There are a number of critical immediate actions that must be taken. First, repair the existing streetcar lines and rolling stock, and restore bus service. We must quickly update the transit plan. We need to design the light rail lines plus the rapid transit to the airport and Baton Rouge right away because they can happen quickly. We must secure funding for the rail system. Because of the disaster, the city now may have higher priority for federal matching grants. In addition to providing transit, we need to repair and improve streets, and their associated drainage.

In the longer term, we need to construct the connections to the airport and Baton Rouge, Slidell, and then to the Gulf Coast jointly with the states of Louisiana and Mississippi. We must construct the new light rail lines. We understand that not every line will be built right away, so we must provide bus rapid transit service in the short term. This is bus service, typically on exclusive rights of way, that operates much more quickly than traditional buses, providing close to the lower end of the service range of light rail. As population increases we can convert the highest use bus rapid transit routes to fixed rail; it is a phased system that brings high service everywhere upfront.

Parks and Open Space Plan

With the discussion so far focusing on infrastructure, we might remember to ask a question: If the city is not also a beautiful and inspiring place, why would anyone want to live there?

All citizens should have access to beautiful park and open space. Every neighborhood should have a park. Many neighborhoods do not have either in sufficient quantity or quality. These parks should planned and designed to perform many functions. They are not just open spaces; they can be part of a citywide system that connects neighborhoods to employment, and neighborhood to neighborhood. We can also

expand our thinking of parks and use the edges of canals, now reserved for maintenance, but becoming available for open space when they are covered. Then they become amenities - part of the city-wide network that also serves individual neighborhoods. Parks also can function as part of an internal storm water management system. Where there is space, stands of urban forest can disguise storm water detention basins, each with a pump to move the water out.

As Figure 7 reveals, the city has a number of large parks including Audubon Park, City Park, Pontchartrain, Joe Brown, and others. While Audubon and City Parks are nationally important, the reality is that many neighborhoods are not well served. Parks add value to existing neighborhoods. As is the case with City Park, they can also become the basis for recovery of an entire section of the city.

The Committee recommends building on an asset unique in extent to this city: the neutral ground system. These wide landscaped medians bring open space and opportunities for connection by all means including transit. Wherever a new street needs to be constructed or a damaged one reconstructed, design in these medians.

Canal rights-of-way should be incorporated into the park system as well. We have shown these as the large green lines on the figure. Where the canals are put in box culverts, you immediately have open space. Where they are not put in box culverts, but they are no longer a threat, they can become water features. The comparison between Bayou Saint John and the London canal is appropriate. In addition to psychological value, parks create real estate value for residents near them. We have identified a number of areas, shown by dashed circles, where there is potential for future parkland. The circles are large to indicate that we have not identified properties; those will be determined with citizen involvement in a process described later. The new parks should perform many functions: they provide recreation and open space, they cool the land, they produce oxygen, and they act as part of the city-wide storm water protection and management system.

The City should seize on a significant opportunity to open the riverfront to all its citizens. A small portion of the Mississippi River is accessible to the public now. The area from the Moon Walk through Woldenberg Park and the Riverwalk grants access to the most interesting river in America. This is the river that made the city. The plan recommends that the riverfront walkway be extended along the extent of the Mississippi, from the Industrial Canal to Jefferson Parish. The Trust for Public Land already has a proposal in planning for an approximately one mile long park upriver from the Riverwalk. This plan should be completed and extended. In some areas, particularly upriver in the active port zone, the walkway may be located landside of the flood wall, providing occasional glimpses of the river. National examples, including the 18-mile Hudson Riverwalk, illustrate the power of this public amenity. Regardless of its exact location, the extended riverwalk will provide connection among neighborhoods, visual and physical access to this public resource, and enhance the value of adjacent land.

How do we make this happen? Immediately, we must update the parks and open space element of the Master Plan, identify properties that can become part of the system, and begin to assemble them. Of course we need to secure funding for park restoration. Some, such as City Park, are ready to go with plans (and an estimated implementation cost of $120 million for completion) in hand. In the longer term, we must complete acquisition of necessary properties and implement the plan, coordinating with the strategy for rebuilding neighborhoods.

Rebuilding Neighborhoods Plan

This is the heart of the matter: rebuilding neighborhoods, bringing people back, attracting new residents. Because the Committee wants everyone to return and new people to come, we have to support and create great neighborhoods.

What Makes a Great Neighborhood?

What would make a great community? What would make someone choose this community? It is a place where you have family, friends, and neighbors. It reflects the unique history of each place and respects the physical pattern that makes that neighborhood special, the blocks, the architecture, and the landscape. It provides housing choices: mixed income communities with different types and costs of housing for owners and renters. It should be accessible through public transit and bike as well as on foot and by car. Each should have a center: the place you go to meet friends or gather on special occasions, and a place that serves your daily needs.

The Neighborhood Center Model

This vision of a great neighborhood is very important because neighborhoods are the centers of activity and everyone's daily life. The Committee developed a Neighborhood Center model to make these considerations explicit. We know that a neighborhood requires sufficient population to support the equitable and efficient delivery of public facilities and services. In other words, there have to be enough people living close to each other to justify the expenditure of public funds to serve them. When this happens, then every neighborhood can have basic infrastructure it must have: roads, drainage that works, utilities and other public services. Each should have public schools, close enough for elementary students to walk if they want. Of course private and parochial schools will remain an important part of the education mix. Every neighborhood should have cultural and community facilities, places of worship, health facilities, park and open space within an easy walk, and convenience retail - the things we all need. The neighborhood should have access to public transit.

The illustration (Figure 8) presents one way some of these elements might be combined in an abstract neighborhood. This might be applied to many places in the city of New Orleans, places that need to be rebuilt dramatically, or that just need new houses to fill in the empty lots. It might be Lakeview, the Lower 9th Ward, Central City, New Orleans East, or elsewhere.

The drawing shows a major street with a light rail transit line and a station. We know that kind of activity generates investment; therefore we see the mixed use center with

retail and other services for residents and transit riders around the stop. The neutral ground model is used, leading away from the transit stop into the community, with mixed use commercial and higher density houses along it. Then the central park around which are located the community high school, public library, cultural and community center, and perhaps health facilities. Beyond are recreation fields which are jointly used by the high school and the community. Going further, there is the opportunity for an environmental center and a wetland park, one of the neighborhood parks described earlier that also function to detain and manage storm water. Around these areas are existing houses, new houses, neighborhood greenways connecting the elementary school and city parks, connecting to the citywide system. This is not a neighborhood in isolation; it is connected in every way by transit, by open space, and by roads.

As we plan to rebuild New Orleans with these aspirations in mind, we have to remember that in the short term population and City revenue will be greatly reduced. We must use these resources wisely. Most important to accomplish now is the immediate provision of temporary housing to enable citizens to return; it is the lack of usable housing that is keeping citizens away. As we are doing that, we immediately need to turn our attention to establish neighborhood-planning teams to complete plans for the neighborhoods by May 20, 2006 – in a little over four months from today. This is fast, but achievable. Remember that providing houses quickly is the overriding concern now. It must be done in a manner that builds a better city in the long term as well. We must face the fact that there will have to be some consolidation of neighborhoods that have insufficient population to support the equitable and efficient delivery of services. In the short-term, there will be half the population of July 2005. We have no choice but to be responsible with use of limited City resources. We must provide public facilities and services where population is concentrated so these resources can be used in the most equitable and efficient manner possible. We also need to keep in mind that publicly subsidized housing is an asset, and work with HUD where appropriate to make the most of that asset.

Everything we do now must be considered for its long term impact on city-wide recovery and growth. How can every short term action help to make New Orleans a great city – one that is sustainable over the long term? We have developed guidelines to assist the neighborhood planning teams as they address the specifics of their unique situations.

- Many years of experience support a neighborhood population of between approximately 5,000 and 10,000 people as ideal.
- We should know that most residents are committed to return, at least half.
- There should be enough people living close together (density) to permit the delivery of public infrastructure, services, and utilities in an efficient manner.
- Many studies, and the experience and common sense of parents, support the model of small schools: two K-8 public schools and a shared high school to serve a population of approximately 11,000 people.
- Other aspects of a full and satisfying daily life include places of worship, access to convenience retail, health, community, and cultural facilities, parks and open

space, accessibility to the rest of the city and region by transit, and contiguous relationship to other neighborhoods.

After it becomes clear who will return and where, there is likely to be an amount of land not required for the short term population. Neighborhood planning teams will make recommendations on its best use. They should keep in mind the long term use of the land as the city growths again. Rather than leave buildings and land fallow, the city must prepare plans for their management. Many practices can be used to help, including planting of species capable of phyto-remediation of contaminants, tree planting for the 'environmental services' they provide and as a way to create suitable environments in which new residents may wish to live, park and open space, and others.

With all of the preceding in mind, the Committee has identified different kinds of opportunities for neighborhood rebuilding throughout the city: Immediate Opportunity Areas, Neighborhood Planning Areas, and Infill Development Areas. Each has different characteristics.

Immediate Opportunity Areas

These are areas that suffered little or no flood damage. It is common sense, and easily observed, that people have already moved back and started repair activities in these areas. These areas include the downtown concentration of commercial, medical, residential, entertainment, cultural, and hospitality activities as well as educational and medical institutions that have immediate needs. Remember that the critical need is to provide housing for people who want to return. We must identify vacant and underutilized properties for new construction. We must expedite permitting for repairs and for construction of new housing. We need to provide, where they do not exist, and support where they do exist, community and cultural facilities and services so we can begin to build up the daily life of those neighborhoods. We must work with institutions to address their immediate needs so they can get their employees and economic benefits back up and running. These areas are ready to go and repair and construction should begin using current rules and regulations.

Figure 9 generally locates these areas with the yellow tone. They include the West Bank, large areas on the East Bank and parts of New Orleans East. In addition, we have indicated major institutions with dots. These include Southern University, University of New Orleans, Dillard, Delgado, Xavier, Tulane, Loyola, and the medical center in downtown. We have outlined the downtown here because it had relatively little flood damage and is the economic powerhouse of the city and the region, poised for return.

Neighborhood Planning Areas

By act of nature and levee failure, there are other areas that were not so lucky. They contain properties that were deeply flooded and heavily damaged. We call these Neighborhood Planning Areas because they are all neighborhoods. Further, like every neighborhood in the city, their residents must be involved in making decisions about the

future. The difference in these areas is that individual decision making will be more difficult because of severity of damage and the effect of rules imposed from outside the city. When released, the revised Base Flood Elevation maps will likely have a significant effect on many residents' decisions. Because these maps are not now available, it would be irresponsible to guess their effect. The planning with these areas will be especially intense and expeditious.

Figure 10 documents the fact that Immediate Opportunity Areas and Neighborhood Planning Areas cover the entire city. It is very important to note that neighborhood planning will take place in every neighborhood in the city. This will be organized by the Neighborhood Planning Districts shown on this figure. This is a geographic system used by the City Planning Commission that permits quick access to data necessary for planning. Because of differences in severity of damage, some planning districts will require more in-depth attention than others, with the most heavily damaged requiring additional effort. It is the intent of the neighborhood planning process to level the playing field for recovery, regardless of the internal resources in any neighborhood. In fact, many neighborhoods had pre-Katrina plans that can serve as the basis for this effort. Some have already initiated post-Katrina efforts that, likewise, can facilitate completion of the neighborhood planning work.

Neighborhood Planning will be conducted by teams which will be assigned to every planning district and charged to begin work by February 20, 2006. The team members will include neighborhood residents, plus experienced professionals (planner, urban designer, historic preservation expert, City Planning Commission representative, environmental/public health consultant, mitigation planner, finance expert, administrative/technology support). It is very important that each have community outreach support to work with displaced residents as well as those who have already been able to return. Clearly, the greatest challenge will be to contact and involve residents who have not yet returned. The team will use a variety of techniques to accomplish this which may include remote meetings and work sessions, virtual internet neighborhoods, and others. The importance of outreach and follow-through cannot be overemphasized.

These plans will be guided by the neighborhood center model of a healthy and thriving community, by the residents committed to return, and by the knowledge that sufficient population is necessary to support facilities and services. There must be structural and environmental safety both in individual buildings and the environment at large; we must know this by testing, not guessing. Attention must paid to neighborhood history and culture. These plans will be completed by May 20th. This schedule is designed to allow enough time for important new information necessary for residents to make their individual decisions to be made available: in particular, the Base Flood Elevation maps. At the same time, it is designed to move as fast as possible to help the citizens of New Orleans take action on their future. The result of the neighborhood planning process should be a document for each of the planning districts containing the following sections: land uses, their location, and their density intensity; public facilities and services; the likely phasing of development; a property acquisition plan where

appropriate; development guideline controls to make sure any new construction is compatible with neighborhood character.

Infill Development Areas

The third type of neighborhood rebuilding area contains places that offer the opportunity for infill development. They include land that is privately and publicly owned, blighted and adjudicated properties, brownfields, underutilized sites on high ground, or those requiring demolition and clearance. These can be developed with houses, commercial and industrial uses - the activities that make a city work. To take advantage of these opportunities to bring the city back, we need to consolidate public and private ownership to create parcels of land that can accommodate urban development.

Once the neighborhood plans have been prepared, we can issue developer requests for proposals, and select the developers to make the private investments necessary to support the plans. We must remember that our goal is to provide opportunities for houses and jobs, to bring the city back.

We have identified Infill Development Areas in Figure 11. They vary in their characteristics from place to place. For example, there are areas of Algiers where there is relatively little development or underutilized land that could easily provide more housing for returning residents. They are on De Gaulle Drive, south and west of De Gaulle, and in Algiers Point.

On the East bank, there are areas appropriate for infill along the riverfront including Irish Channel and the Lower Garden District (upriver from the bridge), the downtown, and the Marigny and Bywater areas.

There is a series of opportunities for construction of infill development to support returning residents located in a band going across the center of the city. In varying degrees, they contain blighted and adjudicated properties, public land, public housing authority property, and other areas of publicly owned land, all of which can become the seed around which new or revitalized communities can grow. The character of each will be determined through the neighborhood planning process described earlier.

One of these areas is the lower 9th Ward where ultimately it may be necessary to demolish a large number of buildings to protect the public health and safety. This can be an opportunity for the residents to work through the neighborhood planning process to direct the future of this neighborhood, whether it is through infill or larger

concentrations of new buildings taking advantage of the benefits of the neighborhood center model.

There is an unusual infill opportunity in the Almonaster corridor, an area not subject to deep or long flooding. This area is next to a proposed light rail corridor that helps create the opportunity for both residential and employment investment and growth. The Committee has already received unsolicited expressions of interest for this type of housing and jobs development in the area.

Neighborhood Rebuilding Strategy

The Committee's rebuilding strategy (Figure 12) looks at every possible opportunity to rebuild the city. It will build on the results of the neighborhood planning process while it also recommends focus on the best prospects for rapid creation of significant numbers of houses and jobs. The Committee targeted five of these areas that we believe offer the greatest opportunity for achieving our short term goals, while building toward a city that is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable over the long term.

Algiers' underutilized land and vacant or underperforming commercial properties along De Gaulle Drive, coupled with light rail transit service and infill residential construction offer the opportunity of creating many new houses and jobs, linked to reopening of the Behrman School and other public facilities already in planning.

Downtown remains the heart of the region. Its strength will be magnified by construction of the regional rail transit system which will provide extraordinary connections from the CBD to the city, the airport, and Gulf Coast region, and by the high speed light rail system within the city. The opportunities here include dense new residential areas, continued conversion of commercial property to residential use, and growth in entertainment and hospitality with new venues already under discussion. The medical/research complex is ideally located for growth in the center of these activities and the transit system.

In the larger Central City area are many opportunities to build on unique physical and cultural characters, including connection of the O. C. Halley Boulevard through downtown across the Rampart Jazz corridor. This area, in which planning efforts have recently been completed, can become a series of neighborhoods of choice.

The Almonaster corridor target area makes the most of proposed light rail and unsolicited expressions of private interest to work with the city to develop a new

community and support it with job creation opportunities. An area of several hundred acres here could accommodate many hundreds of new houses and jobs.

City-wide Coordination Plan

City-wide coordination is the glue that holds the neighborhood planning efforts together and leads to a draft Master Plan recommendation to the City Planning Commission. If properly structured and supported, it also can be the place where conflicting desires and tough decisions are fairly and equitably discussed – based on facts. The city-wide effort should include the following:

- Standard base maps with common data layers
- Data file for common use including socio-economic, physical, and policy elements
- Information coordination and management (including that necessary to inform discussion of any consolidation recommendations)
- Flood protection and storm water management plan
- Transit plan
- Parks and open space plan
- Interim city-wide development guidelines leading to a focused update of the zoning ordinance
- Assistance structuring the Design Review Committee, its guidelines and procedures
- Public relations shared with neighborhood teams
- Management and finance expertise

The city-wide effort should start immediately to create a more closely defined set of neighborhood criteria based on city capacity (and internal management efficiencies) for facility and service delivery and a base of consistent facts from which the neighborhood efforts can draw. These efforts will advance the neighborhood and city-wide plans so they are internally consistent and able to meet the aggressive schedule.

THE ACTION PLAN

What we have discussed to now is the plan. We have the plan; now is the time for action. We recommend a series of next steps to create the foundation for longer term achievement of the vision and plan.

Next Steps

1) We need to immediately form the Crescent City Recovery Corporation – the CCRC. This will require amending the City Charter to accommodate its formation. The CCRC could take one of at least three forms: 1) it could be a state legislated redevelopment commission with non-political governance that can form and delegate authority to affiliated corporations, or 2) the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority with amended

governance, policies and procedures to accommodate the CCRC, or 3) an adaptation of any federal organization to establish a subsidiary entity with the powers required for the CCRC.

To be effective at the enormous task of rebuilding the city, the CCRC must have the powers to receive and expend redevelopment funds, to implement the redevelopment plan, to buy and sell property including use, as a last resort, of the power of eminent domain. This generally should only be used when health and safety issues exist or adequate public facilities and services cannot be provided. It needs to be able to issue bonds, and it has to coordinate with and enhance the City Planning Commission's capacity to carry out its planning responsibilities.

The CCRC should be governed by a board with between 7-15 members with staggered terms, and however the board is appointed, no single appointing entity should have a majority. Board membership must be based purely upon qualifications. The CEO and staff must be competitively selected, also based purely upon qualifications. The CCRC must sunset. It should have up to a 10-year life span and then end.

2) We must aggressively pursue FEMA, CDBG and other governmental sources of support to implement the plan.

3) To improve chances for the CCRC the city needs and repopulation outcomes, we should support a program that will accommodate buy-out of homeowners who choose to sell their homes in heavily flooded and damaged areas for 100% of the home's pre-Katrina market value, less insurance proceeds and mortgage.

4) There must be time for residents to make informed decisions about their individual plans. We recommend that the City not issue any permits to build or rebuild in heavily flooded and damaged areas until the advisory Base Flood Elevations maps have been issued by FEMA, until the neighborhood planning teams have completed their plans and made their coordinated recommendations in a city-wide plan to the city, and until adequately delivered utilities and city services are available.

5) To make this happen we must immediately begin the neighborhood planning and city-wide coordination process. Neighborhood plans will be complete by May 20th and the city-wide consolidated plan will be completed by June 20th.

6) We also need to design the rapid transit system, and aggressively pursue and secure funding commitments for it no later than January 1, 2007.

7) To be serious about accomplishing this plan, we need to develop the finance programs that will assist homeowners, business owners and investors to implement the recovery plan. There many components to these finance programs. These should include a variety of programs and approaches, to name several: Tax Credits to allow for larger, mixed income, newly constructed apartment communities; extension of Historic Tax Credits to home owners for repair/renovation; CDBG funds for gap financing for home owners' repairs; streamlining FHA home improvement loan processes and allowing for 2nd mortgages; extended mortgage forbearance; below market interest rate loans. We must guarantee that the use of public funds is efficient and accountable. We might also reach out to institutions, businesses, and others to "adopt" neighborhoods and provide funding and services not otherwise available.

8) As we know from experience, this will only produce a sustainable community if there is a predictable development environment, where the rules are linked to the CCRC, and everyone plays by the same rules. To accomplish this we must recommend a new Master Plan to the city. It should be given the force of law through a charter change. The revised zoning and development codes should be designed to implement the Master Plan. Land use authority should be placed with the City Planning Commission and its administration should be fair and consistent. In supporting the new construction already underway, we need to prepare interim development design guidelines and create a design review commission so that these early actions are supportive of a better city. An important part of this must be protection of the integrity of the city's National Register Historic districts.

9) It will take massive private investment to build on the scale necessary. It is absolutely critical to identify and help financially responsible developers to construct large numbers of houses quickly.

<u>What Will It Cost?</u>

What will all this cost? We have early estimates for some elements, while others need to be determined. Likewise, we have made initial determinations of specific potential sources of funding.

- Acquisition of heavily flooded and damaged houses: estimated cost is $12 billion (funding source: CDBG, FEMA HMPG).
- Demolition and site remediation: estimated cost is $700 million (funding source: FEMA Public Assistance – Category A Debris Removal, CDBG).

- Public infrastructure and transit (including the airport line, but excluding Baton Rouge and Gulf coast lines): estimated cost is $4.8 billion (funding source: US DOT - FHWA and FTA, FEMA Public Assistance, CDBG)
- Damaged public buildings: estimated cost is $413 million (funding source: FEMA Public Assistance).
- CCRC operation over its ten year life: estimated cost at $1 million per year is $10 million (funding source: other).
- Reconstruction and long term recovery planning: estimated cost is $5 million (funding source: FEMA, US Economic Development Administration).
- Parks and open space costs will be calculated as part of the planning process. (Funding source: FEMA HMPG and Individual Assistance, US DOT - FHWA Transportation Enhancement Program).

This is evolving on a daily basis. We expect the estimates and funding sources to continue to be refined as work on the detailed city-wide and neighborhood plans progresses.

Schedule

It is important to balance the need to act quickly with the necessity to do so in a thoughtful manner. Here is our schedule:

- January 20th start formation of the neighborhood planning teams. Refine their scope of work and schedule. Begin data collection and analysis for the neighborhood plans and the city-wide planning and coordination effort.

- February 20th neighborhood planning teams start work. Neighborhood plans begin coordination city-wide from the beginning. We create the outreach plan to identify committed returning residents and involve all.

- By March 20th, we will have completed the identification of residents who are committed to return. A month later, before the spring recess, we will have funding for the residential buy-out passed by Congress

- By May 20th, the neighborhood plans will be complete and ready for the final city-wide plan coordination work.

- By June 20th the consolidated plan will be recommended to the City Planning Commission. By the end of August, there will be complete financial analysis and

funding secured for reconstruction. We can then begin any necessary property acquisition and start major neighborhood reconstruction.

Key Recommendations

This executive summary covers a great deal of material; yet it only touches superficially on the Committee's work. Much of that is contained in the collected working papers and memoranda of the Urban Planning Committee's six sub-committees. It is clear that we must move quickly and decisively, focusing on short term needs while working toward a sustainable future. Therefore, we summarize our key recommendations.

- The Louisiana Recovery Authority develop a program to buy heavily flooded and damaged homes at 100% of their pre-Katrina market value, less insurance recovery proceeds and mortgage.
- We must aggressively pursue the neighborhood planning process and implement the recommendations of those efforts within a coordinated city-wide plan.
- We should not issue building permits in the heavily flooded and damaged areas until the neighborhood planning process is complete this summer. Investment decisions in these areas must be based on facts that are not yet available.
- We must create the Crescent City Recovery Corporation which is necessary to manage and direct the recovery process.
- We must start major housing construction in the target development areas to provide the houses people need now.
- We must design, fund and construct the high-speed transit system which will strengthen and support the city.

There will more work and sacrifice ahead. Therefore, we should remind ourselves of the vision that calls us to action. New Orleans, a city that is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. A city built on the best of its legacy. The best city in the world.

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