



NATIONAL TRUST
for HISTORIC PRESERVATION®

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RICHARD MOE
PRESIDENT

January 12, 2006

The Honorable C. Ray Nagin
Mayor, City of New Orleans
1300 Perdido, Room 2E04
New Orleans, LA 70112

Dear Mayor Nagin:

I am very sympathetic with the difficult decisions you are facing regarding the recommendations of your rebuilding commission. I would not presume to advise you on those matters affecting the kind of city New Orleans might become because I believe strongly that the future of the city should be determined by those who live there. I would only say that we are very pleased that the report recognizes so vividly the unique role that historic districts play in New Orleans and thus the necessity to restore them.

But there is one commission recommendation which I am compelled to urge you not to adopt, and that involves suspending the issuance of building permits for four months in those areas which have been severely flooded. Preventing homeowners from taking those steps necessary to make their homes habitable would, in my view, deal a very serious blow to the recovery momentum which is now beginning to build all over the city.

The National Trust has already begun a program, together with the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, called HOME AGAIN!, which will enable low- and moderate- income owners of historic homes in the city to begin the process of making them livable by providing grants of up to \$40,000. These are largely individuals who do not have flood insurance or other means to rebuild. Many of them are prepared to begin the process now, and if they are asked to wait an additional four months many of them will surely get discouraged and still others will not have sufficient incentive to return at all. The purpose of beginning this demonstration project is to show that the vast majority of these areas CAN be rebuilt, and to help persuade those who are uncertain about returning and rebuilding, to do so. Time is critical in this regard.

A number of other non-profit organizations have similar efforts underway that would also be halted in their tracks if you impose a moratorium on building permits. Numerous individual homeowners have begun the process themselves and their efforts would be frustrated as well. All of this positive effort – precisely what New



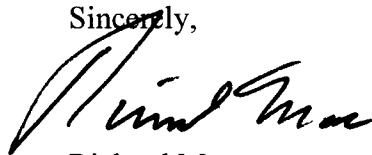
*Recipient of the National
Humanities Medal*

Orleans needs the most right now – would be suspended, and I fear that much of it would be lost.

At the very least, I would urge that building permits be allowed in the city's nineteen National Register Historic Districts, which contain 38,000 historic structures. We have concluded that every single one of these historic districts can and should be rebuilt, and that the overwhelming majority of damaged structures within their boundaries can be repaired. These are the Creole cottages, shotgun houses and historic bungalows that constitute the heart and soul of New Orleans. These are the neighborhoods most important to the identity of New Orleans, and they must be allowed to lead the city's neighborhood recovery effort.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Moe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "M".

Richard Moe

RM:tra