

APA Board of Directors

Statement of the American Planning Association in Response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

**September 24, 2005
Buffalo, New York**

The Katrina Hurricane and Flood was the greatest urban and regional disaster in U.S. history. The disaster was soon made worse by Hurricane Rita. The rebuilding of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast will involve the largest and most complex planning effort in our lifetime. It will involve substantial analysis and public debate regarding trade-offs between idealistic goals and expediency. It will include some of the most difficult planning issues of our time – environmental justice, racial equity, restoration of natural systems, infrastructure repair, property acquisition and condemnation, environmental clean-up, cultural heritage preservation, hazard mitigation, economic development and urban redevelopment, all at a scale never before seen.

The planning profession must be highly visible as it collaborates with affected citizens and allied professions. Planners must use the latest planning techniques and ideas in order to improve both the intelligence of this complex rebuilding process and the sustainability of the Gulf Coast. Good planning must ensure that the multi-billion dollar rebuilding effort is accomplished as equitably, efficiently, democratically and humanely as possible.

Now is the time to help shape these immediate and long-term planning processes, because they will be affected by decisions made over the next few weeks and months. It is also important to recognize that our colleagues in Louisiana and Mississippi will require assistance from external sources, because their community and personal resources are severely depleted at a time when they are most needed by their communities.

APA believes that the following principles must be followed:

- Urgency must be balanced with informed decisions. The best examples of past studies, good planning, and the lessons of history must be utilized, so that the same environmental and rebuilding errors will not take place. Regulatory and environmental processes must not be bypassed in the name of expediency; the building and infrastructure review process, however, must expedite priority projects which will help everyone.
- The rebuilding must be fair, with solid attention to the creation of communities of mixed income, races and ethnic groups, built upon an economy of small and

medium sized businesses, vibrant tourist areas, commercial downtowns, and petrochemical and shipping industries rebuilt with a greater concern for the fragile environment.

- Effective disaster prevention, response and mitigation measures can occur only with adequate and effective investment in infrastructure for all our communities and for this specific region.
- Temporary housing must be planned and built as part of the long-term redevelopment of communities, so that people who do return can, as much as possible, begin to live and recover with their neighbors.
- Permanent replacement housing must preserve homeownership for those who were homeowners at the time of the disaster, and must provide opportunity for improved and affordable housing conditions for low-income households.
- A regional approach to planning must be employed, in which city, suburbs, rural areas and regions are part of an overall redevelopment and environmental strategy, with funding priority being given for long-term far-sighted improvements that address the region's geographic, environmental and economic needs.
- Public funding must be provided for neighborhood and community planners to assist residents in planning and financing their reconstruction, to provide an opportunity to develop creative strategies for neighborhood improvement and evacuee community building, and to provide a communication link between local government and residents.
- The effort will require support for data collection and analysis, including mechanisms for sharing of data resources among agencies, as well as adequate staffing of municipal, regional, state, and Federal planning institutions.
- We also must develop technical materials and training programs that build local and regional capacity to engage in informed deliberations, and the development of a range of communication media, in order to ensure participation by all stakeholders, including displaced residents. Adequate citizen participation will be ensured through this process.
- The federal government must continue to work and collaborate with experienced planners in Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas.
- The federal government and the states must learn from the examples of others in the control of floods and natural hazards, such as the Netherlands, Venice, and London.

- Federal funding to support all of the above must be sufficient and must not be taken from programs that aid disadvantaged people throughout the U.S.

In response to this challenge APA has immediately launched a series of initiatives, including providing news media with contact names of members knowledgeable about disaster recovery, organizing a special Katrina recovery workshop at the Louisiana state chapter annual meeting, issuing an edition of our electronic publication *interact* focused on what planners can do within their own reach to help speed recovery, arranging a nationwide audio/web recovery conference for our members, and creating a Katrina section of the web with many educational resources made available.

APA National as well as our professional institute, AICP, and our Chapters, Divisions, and Student organizations will work to advance the following priorities*:

1. Establish and be able to convey the planning principles that need to be embodied within disaster preparedness, mitigation and recovery planning.
2. Focus our efforts on channeling volunteers, financial and other resources to assist in the recovery and advance our Development Plan objectives.
3. Use Community Planning Teams to address a variety of planning, rebuilding, mitigation, and other needs. (For instance, the sponsorship or adoption of a particular community's planning needs.)
4. Focus on building planning capacity to address immediate rebuilding needs, and assist other communities with disaster preparedness planning.
5. Use existing APA opportunities, conferences and venues to focus on these issues.
6. Articulate how our members can be involved on a personal basis and help build the capacity for planning.

APA will continue to dedicate resources to assist in an effort that must be commensurate with the challenges and opportunities presented by this unprecedented disaster.

*This list was developed by the Katrina Working Group at the Fall Leadership Meetings in Buffalo, NY on September 22, 2005 with representatives from the Board, Commission, Chapter Presidents Council, Divisions Council, and Student Representatives.