

Charting the Course for Rebuilding a Great American City:

An Assessment of the Planning Function in Post-Katrina New Orleans



The American Planning Association's New Orleans Planning Assessment Team

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In Cooperation with the University of New Orleans, College of Urban and Public Affairs

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Presented to the New Orleans City Planning Commission
and the Louisiana Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA)

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Charting the Course for Rebuilding a Great American City

An Assessment of the Planning Function in Post-Katrina New Orleans

The American Planning Association (APA), in response to requests from the New Orleans City Planning Commission and APA's Louisiana chapter, assembled a team of six qualified urban planners to assess the capacity of the city's planning function in the aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina disaster. After gathering preliminary information about its assignment, APA's New Orleans Planning Assessment Team visited the city from October 23 to 28, 2005; conducted a tour of the city's devastation; interviewed a cross section of public officials and community leaders; and thus formulated a set of conclusions and recommendations that might assist local officials as they seek to make sound decisions about the city's restoration and redevelopment. This report presents the APA Team's general observations about the city's planning function, including activities of the City Planning Commission and the Mayor's Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) Commission. On the basis of those observations, the report proceeds to make recommendations for addressing short—and long-term planning issues, and suggests appropriate next steps.

The APA Team thanks members of the City Planning Commission, the Louisiana chapter, and the many citizens of New Orleans who, even under conditions of extraordinary distress, hosted us with their unique brand of hospitality. We would also like to thank the University of New Orleans (UNO) and its College of Urban and Public Affairs for their research and logistical support during our visit. Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the generosity of the APA Planning Foundation and APA's City Planning and Management Division, whose timely financial support enabled us to provide assistance at no cost to our clients.

The APA Team has operated under no illusions about our own capacity to advise the city. Our team is small, our visit has been brief, and, as outsiders, our knowledge of the city and its planning activities is obviously limited. In view of these constraints, we have adopted certain principles to guide our work. First, we have focused sharply upon our mission to assess the city's planning function and have resisted the temptation to provide unsolicited advice about specific economic development, land use, and infrastructure issues. Secondly, to avoid reinventing the wheel, we have sought to take full advantage of the excellent work that has previously been performed by the City Planning Commission, UNO's College of Urban and Public Affairs, the Bureau of Governmental Research, and others who have thoughtfully studied the city's planning process. Third, we have collected factual information and insights from a diverse array of elected and appointed officials, business and neighborhood leaders, developers, preservationists, and others who care deeply about their city, yet we have exercised complete independence in evaluating their opinions and forming our own. Fourth, we have sought to leverage our limited resources by collaborating with the Urban Land Institute (ULI), the American Institute of Architects (AIA), the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and other national organizations that are also assisting the city in its recovery. Finally, we have concentrated on providing local officials with practical advice that would be financially and politically feasible to implement in a timely way.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE CITY'S PLANNING FUNCTION

By evaluating previous studies, interviewing local experts, and attending meetings of the

two local commissions with the authority to lead post-Katrina redevelopment planning—the statutory City Planning Commission and the Mayor's BNOB Commission—the APA Team has been able to make some general observations about the city's planning function. We have used these observations as the basis for an analysis by which we might classify the planning function's attributes as assets, needs, opportunities, and challenges.

Assets

The city's planning function enjoys a variety of positive attributes that can provide a foundation for future improvement. The most important of these assets may lie in the legacy of visionary planning associated with much of the city's history, from the French colonial era through the rise of contemporary preservation and urban design movements. This legacy is evidenced today in some of the city's planning activities, including efforts to promote appropriate development along the downtown riverfront. Another important asset is the active involvement of neighborhood leaders and preservationists in the city's planning process, along with the wealth of academic and nonprofit resources that support the city's planning and urban design activities. Those resources include the various education, research, and outreach programs that are sponsored by UNO, Tulane University, the Bureau of Governmental Research, the Preservation Resource Center, and other local institutions. Yet another positive attribute is the support available from various professional organizations at the local and national levels. APA, ULI, and AIA all have active chapters in Louisiana, and all have committed substantial nationwide resources to the rebuilding of New Orleans.

Needs

At this time of unprecedented demand for an effective planning function in New Orleans, the APA Team observed several significant needs that warrant immediate attention. Perhaps most glaring is the need for additional staff resources within the City Planning Commission. Before Katrina, the City Planning Commission had a staff of 24, which was not adequate for a city of New Orleans's size and complexity. (Approximately half of these positions were held by professional planners.) The disaster and resulting municipal budget cuts, however, have reduced the staff to a mere eight positions. Furthermore, the BNOB Commission also requires additional staff resources to fulfill its planning mission. Compounding this need for staff resources is the need to coordinate planning activities among various entities—particularly between the City Planning Commission and the BNOB Commission—so as to promote effective communication among participants and observers alike, and so as to increase the likelihood that local officials will make sound decisions about the city's redevelopment.

A third need involves the city's officially adopted master plan, which is not commonly recognized as influential in the city's development. The contents of the master plan, especially its guiding principles and its land-use policies, can actually provide local officials with valuable guidance in making decisions, but the master plan lacks a clear, concise, and prominent message to inspire the community. Consequently, the APA Team has found surprisingly few public officials and community leaders who rely upon the master plan as a source of guidance. Studies have found that the city council routinely over-

turns a large percentage of the City Planning Commission's recommendations, even when those recommendations are clearly consistent with the master plan. Furthermore, the city's 1970s zoning ordinance, which is one of the most important tools for implementing the master plan, is now outdated and may be ill-suited to regulate certain aspects of post-Katrina redevelopment, such as resubdivision, the establishment of nonconforming uses, and mixed-use development.

Overlying all of these needs is a popular perception that neighborhood leaders and ordinary citizens lack opportunities for regular and meaningful participation in the city's planning process. Many of New Orleans's best-informed citizens, representing a variety of interests and socioeconomic backgrounds, have expressed strong feelings about being left out of that process in the past and especially now, when the city faces many critical issues affecting their families and businesses. If the planning function in New Orleans is to regain its credibility throughout the community, then the city's redevelopment program should include a more inclusive and more effective public involvement process, beginning with citizen participation in the BNOB Commission's planning activities.

Opportunities

Even in the midst of crisis, the city's planning function can take advantage of existing and emerging opportunities to become more effective. The city's economic vitality, its cultural diversity, its pedestrian activity, and other aspects of its extraordinary urban character have served to attract a high level of national interest and support, and that support represents a valuable opportunity to

strengthen the planning function. Furthermore, the immediate need to complete the Orleans Parish Hazard Mitigation Plan provides the City Planning Commission with a specific and timely opportunity to take the lead in addressing some of the city's most pressing life safety issues.

Challenges

The APA Team has identified at least three major challenges that may impede the restoration of a strong and effective planning function, at least in the short run. The first of these challenges is the city's budget outlook. The city currently finds itself in a state of financial distress, and the short-term prospects for expanding the tax base are dampened by the catastrophic property losses and economic displacements caused by Hurricane Katrina. Unless the city can secure greater levels of financial assistance, the City Planning Commission appears unlikely to increase its staff resources to an acceptable level within the near future. A second major challenge is associated, ironically, with the urgent necessity to rebuild the city. This urgency may create pressure to disregard important policies from the master plan, and to disregard or waive land-use and historic preservation regulations that serve to implement those policies. The city should resist that pressure, but should review its land-use policies and regulations to ensure that they support post-Katrina redevelopment efforts.

Pre-Katrina, the City Planning Commission and the department did not have a key leadership role in the areas of transportation, economic development, environmental planning, and disaster preparedness. These are typically responsibilities for big city planning departments, and comprehensive planning requires coordination of these functions and

others. Post-Katrina, coordination is critical. The city should immediately, possibly through foundation funding, provide funding sufficient to support this role for planning.

SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

The short-term recommendations are those activities that should be instituted as soon as possible and completed within six to 12 months. These are activities that are tied to disaster response and recovery and can improve the city's capabilities and regulations to respond to this disaster.

Local planning agencies' immediate customers are the citizens of New Orleans and its adjacent areas. The citizens have a number of planning-related questions that are tied directly to their short- and long-term interests and whether they will return to or stay in the city. The major questions are:

- When can I begin to repair or rebuild my structure?
- What, if any, changes do I have to make while repairing or rebuilding my structure?
- Can I obtain loans and flood insurance?

The answers to these questions depend on a number of variables. The local planners should play a major part in obtaining the answers.

Orleans Parish Hazard Mitigation Plan

The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA2K) requires that communities have approved mitigation plans to be able to obtain funds under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and the Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Program, which is a competitive program. Mitigation is defined

as any “sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to human life and property from natural hazards and their effect.” Some might say this should be a long-term recovery action. However, since the Parish does not have an approved plan, the completion of the plan to use as a guide in the recovery process should be considered a short-term action. It is expected that potentially billions of dollars will be made available to Louisiana communities through the state’s Emergency Management Agency. Further, communities with a well-prepared mitigation plan and good projects should rank high for PDM funds.

The Orleans Parish Mitigation Plan is being prepared under the management of the Office of Emergency Preparedness. We were advised that the City Planning Commission had little or no input into the preparation of the plan. Nationally, the best mitigation plans have been prepared in communities where there has been a partnership between the local emergency management agency and the local planning agency. Because the Orleans Parish Mitigation Plan is still being modified, there is an opportunity for the City Planning Commission to provide valuable input. This is important, since the implementing regulations for DMA2K require that existing pertinent planning documents be used in the preparation of the plan (Requirement 201.6 (c)(1)) and that the plan include a discussion on how the local government will incorporate the plan requirements in other local plans (Requirement 201.6 (c)(4)(ii)). It also allows the city to insert additional information into the plan based on lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina. We believe that there are other areas of the plan where the planning staff may be able to use their skills to provide additional input. The city may

wish to request that APA provide a second team to assist the city with the completion of the mitigation plan. If such a request is received, we will make a recommendation to APA’s executive director that a team be sent in the near future. Prior to the deployment of the team, APA should be provided with a copy of the latest draft and a copy of the latest review crosswalk. Provisions should be made for full access to the appropriate officials and data, prior to the arrival of the team, to expedite their completion of the assignment.

Once the city completes the areas of the Orleans Parish Mitigation Plan that need to be revised and submits the plan to the State Emergency Management Agency and FEMA for approval, three additional tasks should be started:

- The Mitigation Plan should be distributed to all interested parties as a parish-wide policy to guide development and redevelopment.
- The Risk Assessment and Vulnerability Assessment of the plan should be reviewed to determine whether changes need to be made in light of Hurricane Katrina and the levee failures and overtopping.
- Staff should begin to prepare site-specific plans for areas of the city for which they plan to request mitigation project funds.

Since the City Planning Commission and the Safety and Permits Department are the first places where most people stop when they want to develop or redevelop lands in the City of New Orleans, copies of the mitigation plan should be available in these offices. Interested individuals should be ad-

vised of the availability of these documents and advised regarding areas of the city that may be affected by the information included in the plan.

Because the revised risk assessment and the project plans are improvements to the Orleans Parish Mitigation Plan, FEMA funding should be available,

Although the regulations for DMA2K only require that a plan be updated every five years, we recommend that the revision to the risk and vulnerability assessments be started as soon as possible, since the outcome will have an effect on whether residents will repair or rebuild their structures and how they will rebuild. To facilitate the risk assessment, it is imperative that:

- FEMA release its advisory letters on the base flood elevations as soon as possible;
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the National Science Foundation complete their analyses of why the levees failed and make recommendations to Congress regarding appropriate measures to provide protection to the residents of New Orleans; and
- FEMA should expedite the preparation and release of the new Flood Insurance Rate Maps.

The Office of Emergency Preparedness should take the lead to ensure that the revised risk assessment is completed and should coordinate with the City Planning Commission on preparing the vulnerability assessment, since the vulnerability assessment deals with both existing and proposed built environments.

The City Planning Commission should take the lead on preparing site-specific

project plans. While the city may decide to target some funds to mitigate the effects of wind, we have chosen to focus this report on the effects of flooding, since the scope of the damage from the flooding component of Katrina far outweighs that from wind. Project plans are prepared for specific sites in the community where mitigation actions will be targeted. Common mitigation actions in response to flooding include:

- The purchase and demolition of severely damaged structures;
- The relocation of structures that have been damaged but may benefit by relocating further from the source of the damage;
- Elevation of structures above the base flood elevation or the flood-of-record elevation;
- Structurally dry floodproofing of nonresidential structures.

The City Planning Commission staff should take a lead on this task since much of the information used in the project plans usually resides in either the planning office or the Safety and Permits office.

- The plan is similar in composition to a plan used to guide development;
- The planning agency is traditionally the repository of the information used to guide citizens' decisions, and the staff is usually versed in the type of answers that residents may need to guide their decisions;
- Planning staffs are generally skilled in conducting the types of public meetings that will invariably be held as part of the process.

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and the New Orleans Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance

The NFIP and floodplain management work hand in hand. Flood insurance is available to citizens through licensed property casualty agents. It is available to anyone with property in a community that participates in the NFIP. The City of New Orleans participates in the NFIP. Flood insurance is available whether or not a site is located in a mapped floodplain. Regardless of whether or not residents had flood insurance before Katrina, if they are in a 100-year floodplain they will be required to obtain flood insurance in order to receive a federal grant, loan, or federally insured loan from a lender to repair their structures. We recommend that the City Planning Commission obtain free flood insurance brochures and guidance documents from the Federal Insurance Administration and make these documents available to residents. Further, we recommend that the City Planning Commission sponsor flood insurance summits for local insurance agents and lenders to educate these individuals regarding the NFIP.

The Safety and Permits Department administers the city's Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance. Currently, the department is in the midst of conducting substantial damage determinations for all structures damaged by Katrina or redamaged by Rita. We were able to review the reports that they have completed and based on the procedure as it was explained to us, the review should meet the requirements of the NFIP. We were also able to review a copy of the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance. We recommend that the city make three changes to the ordinance to make it more effective and applicable:

- Freeboard provision
- Extra protection for critical facilities
- Variance procedures for historic properties

Based on our tour of flood-damaged areas, it appears that many of the residential structures were on elevated foundations. Unfortunately, the structures were not elevated enough to forestall damage. For this reason, we recommend that the ordinance include a freeboard provision. A freeboard is an additional level that elevates a structure above the base flood elevation. The purpose of a freeboard is to address the uncertainties of a flood study and provide an additional level of protection. While we are not recommending a specific freeboard, we recommend that a study be completed, based on current flooding, to determine the proper level. The City Planning Commission and the Safety and Permits Department should already have much of the data available to complete this study. It should be noted that the city is a participant in the Community Rating System (CRS) of the NFIP. Communities that are in CRS receive points for exceeding the minimum requirements of the NFIP. New Orleans is a class 8 community, meaning that the residents of the community receive a 10 percent reduction in their flood insurance rates. By adding a freeboard provision to the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance, the city could receive additional points toward a class 7 rating. A class 7 rating equals a 15 percent reduction in flood insurance rates. The higher the freeboard, the greater the points that are available towards the class 7 rating.

The city tour showed that a number of critical facilities such as fire stations, hospitals, senior citizen complexes, schools that normally serve as emergency shelters, and

even the Superdome were damaged by flooding. We recommend that the city change its Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance to require that future critical facilities, as well as those critical facilities that have been substantially damaged, be elevated or floodproofed to an elevation above the 500-year flood elevation.

We also noticed that the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance does not include variance procedures for historic structures. Per 44 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 60.6 (a), a community can “issue a variance for the repair or rehabilitation of historic structures upon determination that the proposed repair or rehabilitation will not preclude the structure’s continued designation as a historic structure and the variance is the minimum necessary to preserve the historic character and design of the structure.” In light of the city’s large number of historic structures, it is recommended that this variance be added to the ordinance. Additional information on the variance procedures and guidance on the types of mitigation activities that apply to historic structures may be obtained from FEMA.

The City Planning Commission should coordinate with the Safety and Permits Department to prepare recommendations for the appropriate oversight body to revise the Flood Damage Prevention ordinance.

Recovery and Reconstruction Ordinance

The City Planning Commission staff requested that we research the need for a Recovery and Reconstruction Ordinance (RRO). Normally an RRO is prepared by a community prior to a disaster to guide the community’s recovery and reconstruction process. A number of the activities normally covered in an RRO have already been started post-Katrina.

When excluding the normal sections that appear in most ordinances, the RRO is divided into:

- Recovery Organization
- Recovery Plan
- General Provisions
- Temporary Regulations
- Temporary and Permanent Housing
- Hazard Mitigation Program

Some of the issues that are addressed in these sections are already underway. The BNOB Commission, staffed by city agencies, arguably could be considered as the Recovery Organization and the final document prepared by the commission could be considered the Recovery Plan. The General Provisions cover Post-Disaster Operation, Coordination with FEMA and Other Agencies, and Coordination with Citizens. Again, most of the sub-sections included in this section are already underway.

Temporary Regulations are divided into a number of subsections. Damage Assessments are underway under the supervision of the Safety and Permits Department and Debris Clearance is underway under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The remainder of the subsections could possibly be put into a recovery plan for this disaster; however, additional research with full access to local officials would be needed to determine which activities are already underway and which remaining activities the departments would find useful. The subsections that may be useful are:

- A one-stop center for permit expediting
- Temporary repair permits for minor repairs to secure structures

- Deferral of fees for reconstruction permits
- Creation of a policy regarding the reestablishment of nonconforming buildings and uses that have been destroyed
- Creation of a policy regarding notices, FEMA reviews, and historic preservation agency reviews before historic structures that are an imminent hazard to health or safety or of collapsing on a public right-of-way may be approved.

The review and placement of sites for temporary housing is also underway. The city must resolve its post-Katrina public notice problems before an expedited permit program for permanent housing could be put in place.

The preparation of a mitigation plan is already underway, as noted above.

The APA Team recommends that the City Planning Commission refer to the APA Planning Advisory Service Report 483/484, *Planning for Post-Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction*. A model boilerplate ordinance can be found on pages 149-167. We believe that the City Planning Commission's existing staff is capable of adapting this model ordinance for its purposes in accordance with our recommendations. For clarification, the staff should contact Jim Schwab, AICP, Senior Research Associate for APA in Chicago. We recommend that the City Planning Commission contact UNO's College of Urban and Public Affairs regarding the coordination of a team of local experts to do research and complete the preparation of a recovery ordinance that addresses these five issues.

Streamline the Zoning and Preservation Review Processes

The present zoning and subdivision review processes can take four to six months from

submission to approval. There is a developing backlog of applications due, in part, to the recent inability to provide proper notification as a result of disruptions in city mailing services and the temporary relocation of property owners. The rebuilding effort will undoubtedly create a crush of applications requiring zoning and preservation reviews. This will be exacerbated by recent reductions in staff levels at the City Planning Commission, Historic Districts Landmarks Commission (HDLC), and Vieux Carre Commission (VCC). To facilitate critical rebuilding and avoid pressures to suspend zoning and preservation regulations, both processes need to be as efficient as possible.

In an effort to improve efficiency, City Planning Commission staff report formats should be modified to reduce them to a few pages, with minimum narrative. APA's Planning Advisory Service reports on this subject could be helpful in providing a model format. In addition, notification procedures should be amended to reflect the extraordinary circumstances by researching and implementing alternative means of notification. These might include: a toll-free call-in number for displaced persons, earlier mailings, or extended reply periods to account for slow forwarding processes. APA Research Department staff may be helpful in finding sources for other ideas.

Consider Relocation of HDLC and VCC Staffs to Planning Commission Offices

We recommend that the City Planning Commission consider extending office space to the HDLC and VCC staff to encourage cooperation, coordination, and enhancement of staff resources. This initiative could also expedite the permit process, which could serve as a step toward one-stop permitting.

Establish an Inclusive, Ongoing Public Involvement Process for Rebuilding

From discussions with community-based organizations, we ascertained that there is a need for a more broadly based, fully inclusive, and ongoing opportunity for public involvement in the rebuilding program. Such involvement will ensure meaningful feedback and make it more likely that city residents and property owners will buy in to the proposed programs.

The BNOB Commission should initiate and fund the implementation of a broad public participation process that would include the best practices employed in the last few years in regional visioning efforts in many metropolitan areas and central cities, including Birmingham, Houston, and Atlanta. These efforts sought to achieve a broad consensus about the future of the city and region, including its economy, form of development, and the preservation of its environments (natural and neighborhood). They used a number of nationally respected, experienced, and innovative consulting firms to structure and facilitate the participation process. The consultants used a range of techniques, including multiple workshops where citizens, using computer simulations, could see the impact of alternative development scenarios and vote electronically on proposed alternative programs. Citizens could participate directly or remotely by community access television or online through interactive websites. These techniques could be particularly useful to engage New Orleans residents dispersed by the storm. Such techniques would permit involvement at key decision-making points throughout the process—a key factor in ensuring satisfaction in participation and in enhancing the likelihood of consensus on a final rebuilding plan.

Encourage Full Participation in the BNOB Strategic Framework Development Process

Developing a fully inclusive public involvement process and engaging consultant assistance will take time, but the planning for rebuilding is already underway. Therefore, as an early step towards a more inclusive process that would also demonstrate a commitment to full participation, the BNOB Commission should ensure that neighborhood/preservation organizations and the City Planning Commission are sought out and involved in a visible way through open participation on the various subcommittee task forces and through the ULI Advisory Panel process that will meet in New Orleans from November 13 to 18.

Planning Commission/City Council Retreat

The City Planning Commission, city council, and representatives from the mayor's office should hold a one-day retreat to consider the implementation of the ULI—recommended strategy framework and the APA Assessment Team recommendations. The APA team could conduct the retreat after the ULI report is submitted to the BNOB Commission.

Community Workshop to Review City's Master Plan

To ensure that the short-term urgency of the rebuilding effort does not displace the city's long-term planning and development processes, it is important to review key completed elements of the city's master plan to ensure their relevance to the conditions resulting from Katrina, and to include the redevelopment strategy proposals as vetted by community feedback. To permit important

modifications in a timely manner that will contribute to the rebuilding effort, a short intensive workshop should be conducted after the BNOB strategy framework is completed and after an opportunity for community feedback on the strategy has occurred. This workshop, to be conducted over a two- to three-day period under the auspices of the BNOB Commission and the City Planning Commission, could use the capabilities of APA, ULI, AIA and any consultant assistance acquired by the BNOB Commission. It should be structured to encourage participation by community groups. The land-use element of the master plan would be the focus of the review, but the relevant aspects of the transportation, parks, preservation, and economic development elements should be considered as well.

Examples of possible modifications that could be considered include:

- Greater density, with mixed-use, mixed-income development in appropriate locations, while ensuring protection of existing neighborhoods;
- Creation of a light rail transit line connecting rebuilt residential neighborhoods with downtown employment centers and the airport; and
- Expanded parklands and greenways where rebuilding is not desirable.

One product of the workshop would be a summary of the Master Plan. The summary could be in the form of an illustrative map to be hung on the wall as a reference point at City Planning Commission meetings, in rooms where strategic decisions are made on rebuilding, in offices where the programs are implemented, and where neighborhood or-

ganizations meet to consider the impacts of proposed zoning changes.

Review and Amend the Zoning Ordinance

Since the zoning ordinance was adopted well after the building of most of the city, a significant portion of its housing stock may be nonconforming. This status could hinder rebuilding some neighborhoods to their pre-Katrina form and density. Adjustments should be made to permit “of-right” reconstruction. Provisions should be made to ease re-subdivision and permit mixed-use development in appropriate areas. Accordingly, following the completion of the master plan review workshop, the pending contract to revise the comprehensive zoning ordinance could be modified to carry out this more explicit and immediate need.

An example of the potential need for modifications is in the Lower Ninth Ward, where current zoning requires lot widths larger than the typically existing narrow lots. A remedy might include creating a provision that would allow destroyed structures built on lots platted prior to 2005 to be rebuilt without need of a variance.

LONG-RANGE RECOMMENDATIONS

Most people agree that the survival of the City of New Orleans depends largely on its ability to accomplish a number of objectives in the short term. While at times it may be overwhelming to consider the responsibilities of the planning function beyond the post-Katrina recovery process, the long-term planning function is critical to the city’s sustainability.

There are five areas that should be addressed with regard to a long-term commitment to planning in New Orleans. First, all master plan elements need to be finalized by

City Planning Commission staff with neighborhood input and approved by the City Planning Commission and city council. A formal neighborhood planning program should be established to ensure meaningful and consistent inclusion of all citizens in the city's planning process. The City Planning Commission staff should expand its role in the development of the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Planning commission staff should take the initiative in researching opportunities to increase the CRS credit for flood insurance, which will inevitably result in the reduction of flood insurance rates for the citizens of New Orleans. Finally, the City Planning Commission's staff capacity must be increased to ensure that it is equipped to accomplish its enlarged responsibilities post-Katrina.

Finalizing the Master Plan

In October 1997, the City of New Orleans Planning Commission initiated a master plan process by engaging a Technical Advisory Committee and the Master Plan Advisory Committee (consisting of citizens) to produce a framework and develop the component elements and to establish a process for scheduled review of the master plan once adopted. The advisory committees originally submitted a framework for 18 elements to be included in the master plan to the City Planning Commission. The City Planning Commission adopted the advisory committees' recommendations for the framework with minor changes, which included combining some elements and adding a tourism element, and charged the City Planning Commission staff with working with the advisory committees on the completion of the elements. Eventually, it was decided that there were to be a total of 12 component elements in the master plan. Over the next few

years, eight of the 12 elements, including the land-use element, were completed and adopted by the city council. The following four elements still need to be completed: housing; community facilities and infrastructure; natural hazards and critical and sensitive areas; and environmental quality.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the BNOB Commission is charged with recommending a redevelopment strategy for the city. Presumably, this strategy will have implications for the city's master plan. It is critical that the City Planning Commission staff resume the completion of these elements as part of its long-term planning efforts, recognizing both post-Katrina conditions and any adopted redevelopment strategies resulting from the recommendations by the BNOB Commission. Ironically, the issues related to the elements that remain to be completed have been at the forefront of the post-Katrina recovery process, particularly those related to housing, natural hazards, and critical and sensitive areas. Much of the work done during the recovery process might serve as a starting point in the completion of these elements.

An immediate step once long-range planning is resumed is to prioritize the elements so that staff resources can best be utilized. It is critical that an inclusive process be outlined to ensure that the citizens of New Orleans are participants. Just as important is ensuring that the process is not unnecessarily drawn out. That could cause citizens to lose interest in the process and result in cynicism.

Create Formal Neighborhood Planning Program

There appears to be a perception among many of the organized neighborhood and preservation groups, as well as some individual citizens, that the planning process in

New Orleans is not inclusive and not inherently set up to consider or regard the public point of view. While many acknowledged that the City Planning Commission and the city council recognize their legal obligation to notify adjacent property owners of pending zoning and subdivision cases, there is a history of frustration that neighborhoods, in general, have not been included and that citizens are included too late in the process.

The October 2003 issue of the Bureau of Governmental Research's *Emerging Issues* identified the "unhealthy lack of mechanisms for citizen participation" as one of the primary problems plaguing the planning process in New Orleans. There is consensus among neighborhood groups that they lack a voice in the planning process at all levels. Cities comparable in size to New Orleans have pursued a variety of solutions to the problem of inadequate public involvement policies. One highly successful mechanism involves taking a neighborhood approach to presenting proposals to citizens. This involves dividing the planning staff among the neighborhoods or clusters of neighborhoods to serve as liaisons and to ensure that information about proposals for the area is shared in a timely way. Going beyond the letter of the law, staff should seek to encourage zoning and subdivision applicants to independently approach the neighborhoods early in the process, particularly for those proposals that are controversial in nature and that could benefit from discussion and compromise. The staff should also serve as the point of public dialogue on the annual update of the CIP.

In the late 1990s, the City Planning Commission staff used consultants to coordinate the development of Renaissance Plans for the Lower Garden District and the New Orleans East neighborhoods. In addition, Neighbor-

hood One (formerly the Division of Housing and Neighborhood Development) supported initiatives of UNO's College of Urban and Public Affairs Public Outreach component, in conjunction with community and faith-based organizations, to produce neighborhood plans in several areas including the Upper and Lower Ninth Wards, Holy Cross, and Central City's Holy Ghost neighborhoods.

While the City Planning Commission staff was not directly involved in developing the plans in either of these cases, the plans could certainly be a model for a process that would ultimately produce formal plans for neighborhoods or clusters of neighborhoods throughout New Orleans. It would be a challenge for the City Planning Commission staff, even at full capacity, to produce a neighborhood plan for each of the city's neighborhoods; however, they should continue to utilize local planning expertise such as UNO's College of Urban and Public Affairs, Tulane's Regional Urban Design Center, consultants, and nonprofit entities with experience in citizen-based planning initiatives to pursue neighborhood plans in every community.

Ideally, the neighborhood plans need some sort of formal acknowledgment by the City Planning Commission and the city council. In many places, formally acknowledged neighborhood plans are instrumental in the decision to distribute public and private resources, as well as in the decision-making process as it relates to development proposals.

Planning Commission's Role in the Preparation of the Capital Improvements Program

One of the most important functions of a City Planning Commission is to ensure that there

is proper funding for the public facilities and infrastructure improvements needed to maintain a functioning city in accordance with the goals of the master plan. The City Planning Commission collaborates with the Budget Office each year to produce a five-year Capital Improvements Program (CIP), which outlines an evaluation process for projects and establishes a priority system for funding in accordance with the master plan. In light of the requirements of the rebuilding process, the City Planning Commission staff should expand its involvement with the city's Budget Office in the development of the CIP to ensure that it becomes the financing mechanism in the rebuilding process and that there is adequate community involvement. The City Planning Commission and its staff should be expected to assume a leadership role in the City's Capital Improvements efforts, consistent with best practices in other big cities. The City Planning Commission should have sufficient additional staff positions to fulfill these obligations, and they should be filled with planners with specialized expertise in capital programming.

Identify Measures to Improve CRS Standing

The CRS allows for New Orleans to participate in various planning and regulatory activities beyond the minimum requirements of the NFIP to obtain credits that result in the reduction of flood insurance premiums for residents and property owners. The City Planning Commission should initiate efforts to obtain additional credits by reviewing the local land-use regulations and policies and comparing them against creditable activities as outlined in the CRS Manual. Ultimately, the City Planning Commission should make a recommendation to the city council regard-

ing appropriate changes to land-use regulations and policies that might result in acquiring additional credits. The CRS Manual can be obtained from the Insurance Services Office.

Permanently Increase Planning Commission Staff Capacity

Katrina's impact on New Orleans has crippled its ability to maintain employment forces at a functional level. As a result, nearly every city department has experienced a reduction of staff through layoffs. Such layoffs have reduced City Planning Commission staff to eight from 24. Ironically, even at pre-Katrina employment levels, the City Planning Commission would be understaffed to perform effectively, considering the enormous task ahead of it. The City Planning Commission staff should be equipped to fully staff the five divisions that existed pre-Katrina, including administration, comprehensive planning, land use, GIS, and zoning adjustments, as well as additional staff for a neighborhood planning division and increased responsibilities for capital programming and functional planning.

Suggested Next Steps

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|----------------------|---|
| Nov. 8 | CPC reviews APA Report |
| Nov. 10-12 | CPC participates in Louisiana Recovery Authority Visioning Workshop |
| Nov. 13-18 | CPC assists BNOB Commission and ULI in preparing a framework for redevelopment plan |
| TBD Nov./Dec. | CPC and City Council, in cooperation with the Mayor's Office, hold re- |

treat to review ULI and APA recommendations

NLT Dec. 31

CPC assists BNOB Commission in preparing redevelopment plan with citizen involvement

1Q06

CPC conducts community workshop to review and amend Master Plan so as to incorporate redevelopment plan recommendations

CONCLUSION

The City of New Orleans is one of America's great cities and a gem to be treasured. It has been devastated by a disaster that is unprecedented in recent times. A catastrophic disaster can result in a city slowly fading away due to fear, disinterest, or lack of good planning to support the recovery process. It can also result in a community that rises like the fabled Phoenix, using good planning principles to guide the recovery process and capture the imagi-

nation of the whole community.

Leaders of the community, including elected officials, appointed officials, and city staff—including the City Planning Commission staff—must remember that billions of dollars in public money will be coming to New Orleans and surrounding areas. The American people will expect these officials to be the stewards of this money and spend it in a way that will benefit the entire population of the community. This can only be accomplished by establishing a planning process that is fair and equitable to all of the residents and by creating a sustainable community. As David Reid said in *Sustainable Development: An Introductory Guide*,

“There is no myth about the central meanings of sustainability. They are rooted in perennial themes of responsibility to others, providing for the future, and dependence of life on the natural environment.”

The APA Team is confident that local officials, by following these general principles and our specific recommendations, can establish a planning function that will enable New Orleans to become an even greater city in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is the result of an effort by the American Planning Association to respond to needs expressed by the City of New Orleans Planning Department and APA's Louisiana chapter for assistance in determining the best ways to move forward in rebuilding the city in view of the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. Production of the report was underwritten by APA, the APA Foundation, and APA's City Planning and Management Division in Cooperation with the University of New Orleans, College of Urban and Public Affairs. The six-member team consisted of experts reflecting several areas of knowledge and experience essential to the assignment.

APA New Orleans Planning Assessment Team:

Fernando Costa, AICP, Team Leader, Fort Worth, Texas, has served as planning director for the City of Fort Worth since 1998. Before moving to Texas, he served for 11 years as planning director for the City of Atlanta, where he helped community leaders use the 1996 Olympic Games and a federal empowerment zone designation as catalysts for revitalizing Atlanta's central business district and surrounding lower-income neighborhoods. Costa currently chairs the development excellence steering committee for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, which promotes sustainable development throughout the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. He has served as a chapter president, City Planning and Management Division chair, accreditation board member, and *JAPA* editorial board member for APA. Costa received degrees in civil engineering and city planning from Georgia Tech, and served as an officer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Jane S. Brooks, FAICP, New Orleans, chairs the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program at the University of New Orleans where she has been a faculty member since 1976. She established the Historic Preservation Planning concentration in this program, serves as its coordinator, and has been actively involved in community-based historic preservation activities in support of revitalizing diverse New Orleans neighborhoods. For many years she has been an active member of the Executive Committee of the Louisiana Chapter of APA and also serves on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of the American Planning Association*. She has been involved in numerous research and profession practice activities centered on urban areas with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Lila Wallace Readers Digest Foundation in such areas as waterfront revival, park planning, and downtown revitalization. A native of New Orleans, she holds degrees in landscape architecture from LSU and the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Chandra Foreman, AICP, Lakeland, Florida, has recently served as Region III Commissioner of the American Institute of Certified Planners. She has experience in both academic fields and professional practice, serving as a researcher with the University of South Florida's Center for Urban Transportation Research and most recently senior planner for permitting and development services for Lakeland, Florida. She prepared an important report for the Florida Department of Transportation outlining ways to provide better intermodal transportation service at the neighborhood level. With areas of specialization in transportation and environmental justice, Foreman holds a master's degree in planning from Florida State University.

Bob Lurcott, FAICP, Pittsburgh, developed one of the county's most respected big city planning departments as planning director in Pittsburgh from 1977-1989 and as deputy executive director of the Philadelphia Planning Commission before that. He is recognized for building cooperation and confidence among diverse, often conflicting, interests. His innovative work in capital programming, economic restructuring, and funding of community organizations has improved the livability of large older cities, particularly his adopted city, Pittsburgh. He has also extensively advised other cities including Oakland, California, on its vision for the future, and Minneapolis on the organization of its planning function. He received his Bachelor of Architecture and master's in Regional Planning from Cornell University. Lurcott also served as an officer in the U.S. Navy and is past chair of APA's City Planning and Management Division.

Grover Mouton, New Orleans, directs the Tulane Regional Urban Design Center, Tulane University. Under the TRUDC he manages the Southern Regional Mayor's Institute on City Design, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts. Since 2000 he has worked in conjunction with APA on planning and urban design demonstration and training projects in China, including the cities of Nanjing, Tianjin, Zhenjiang, Shanghai and is currently working on the Nantong regional strategic plan. He has served on many design and planning competition juries including Chair of the Womens Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, New York. His drawings have been exhibited widely around the world. He has a Master's of Architecture from the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University; Bachelor's of Architecture from Tulane School of Architecture; and the Rome Prize in Architecture from the American Academy in Rome.

Unfortunately, due to prior commitments that required his presence out of the country, Grover was unable to participate in the site visit.

Richard Roths, AICP, Chicago, is a nationally recognized expert in floodplain management and mitigation planning. Currently Principal Planner for URS Corporation, he has also served as senior planner for FEMA Region V, where he coordinated mitigation planning activities for the region's six states. The lead instructor of mitigation planning courses and mitigation plan review courses for state and local agencies under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Technical Assistance Program, Roths also has participated in the APA Illinois Chapter's Pro-Bono committee. During the Midwest Floods of 1993, he served as the compliance officer for Illinois and prepared the "Standard Operating Procedure for Post-flood Compliance Operations" for the region. He was responsible for ensuring that flood damaged communities were rebuilt in a way that reduced flood risk in the future. He was senior planning officer for the Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission providing technical assistance to county and municipal governments regarding the enforcement of local floodplain regulations, including both zoning and subdivision regulations. Roths has a bachelor's degree in education and a Master of Urban Planning Degree from Wayne State University in Detroit.