

# Executive Summary

The United States has been fortunate to have had very few large-scale urban calamities or warfare on its soil. But this also means that we have limited institutional knowledge of how to reconstruct our modern urban fabric after it has sustained catastrophic levels of devastation. When Hurricane Katrina's storm surge washed over the levees and breached the floodwalls of the City of New Orleans, it caused a catastrophic urban disaster unmatched in U.S. history. For nearly two weeks, water stood in over eighty percent (80%) of the streets of a great American city – two feet in some areas, over ten feet in others. Over 1,000 of our beloved residents were drowned or died and over 180,000 homes were severely damaged or destroyed. Our populace was displaced to all corners of the compass.

The task of reconstructing modern cities is complex and requires comprehensive and integrated approaches to planning, funding, managing and implementing recovery and rebuilding. Over the first year following Katrina, countless agencies, groups and individuals generously provided money, labor, and donations to help New Orleans to recover. And throughout this time, while citizens worked to rebuild their lives, they also spent many precious days and nights in meetings, helping to define a collective voice of hope for the future. Citizens voiced their needs, vision, and desires for the rebuilding of this great city through the Bring New Orleans Back process, the City Council's Neighborhood Planning process, and many other planning efforts.

Then, in August 2006, the Mayor, City Council and City Planning Commission of New Orleans agreed to undertake a 5-month multi-level recovery planning process – the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) process – to develop a unified, comprehensive recovery plan for every neighborhood through each planning district, and for the City as a whole. The Citywide Strategic Recovery and Rebuilding Plan ("Citywide Plan") and thirteen District Recovery Plans are the resulting products of this process, and incorporate and amplify elements of all previous planning efforts to help guide and expedite the recovery and rebuilding of all New Orleans neighborhoods.

Through the UNOP process, thousands of citizens – both those who have and have not yet returned – have voiced their priorities for a unified plan for the City through neighborhood meetings, at least four rounds of district-level meetings in each of the 13 planning districts of the City, and three Community Congresses held simultaneously in New Orleans and multiple cities across the U.S. The Citywide Plan responds to our citizens' desires for their future. It also maintains a core value that all citizens, businesses and neighborhoods in New Orleans have a right to return, and that our citizenry has a right to a Safer, Stronger, Smarter City that also enables a substantially higher quality of life, greater economic opportunity, and greater security against hurricanes than New Orleans had prior to Katrina. It aims to ensure that what happened during Katrina will not happen again by providing a strategic framework for rebuilding that is rooted in safety and protection for every resident, business and investor in our community.

The Citywide Plan is, first and foremost, an action-oriented array of high priority recovery programs and projects to repair and rebuild the City over the next 5 to 10 years. It meets the criteria established by the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) to help inform critical funding and resource allocation decisions by state and federal agencies. It also adheres to the requirements established by the City Planning Commission in its Neighborhood Planning Guide, adopted in June 2006. The programs and projects in this Plan focus on strategic recovery investments and implementation strategies that aim to encourage robust investments, both private and public, so that the City can reasonably and equitably do more than rely on market forces alone, or face debilitating debt or tax increases to fund rebuilding.

## A Strategic Framework for Recovery

The Citywide Plan is developed around a strategic recovery framework that is based upon our citizens' desires for recovery and rebuilding, balanced with the pace of recovery and the risk of future flooding. In January 2007, more than half of our City's population has returned, but the rates of resettlement vary dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood across the City. These variations are caused in large part by the depth of flooding and corresponding levels of damages that residents and businesses sustained.

The strategic recovery framework focuses first on equity and stabilizing every neighborhood to ensure that heaviest damages to infrastructure are repaired, blight is combated, and residents are provided with voluntary incentives that will help protect the investments that many have already made in rebuilding their homes and businesses, and also meet the needs of others to encourage them to return. It then phases recovery projects over time, to ensure that public and private investment in the recovery and rebuilding match the pace of resettlement while also making strategic upgrades in infrastructure, public facilities, and public services throughout the City to ensure that we rebuild Safer, Stronger, and Smarter.

## Core Programs in the Plan

The central elements of the Plan focus on providing enhanced flood protection, stabilizing neighborhoods, providing affordable housing for all, enhancing public services, and providing state-of-the-art education and health care systems throughout the City. These are all the top priorities expressed by thousands of citizens through UNOP's extensive citizen participation process (in association with AmericaSpeaks, as facilitator of the national citizen outreach program in three Community Congresses) implemented as part of the Unified New Orleans Plan process.

### “Elevate New Orleans” Program

This voluntary program encourages owners to elevate their house to the new FEMA Base Flood Elevation (BFE) or higher. This program is intended to fill the gap between what the LRA or FEMA will pay and the true costs to elevate structures.

### “Slab-on-Grade” Remediation Program

This voluntary program helps owners of slab-on-grade homes to rebuild in a more traditional New Orleans style, either on piers or chain walls or with first floor basements, in order to protect their lives and property from future flooding. This program is also intended to provide gap financing between the cost of construction of an equivalent slab-on-grade home and elevating the new home to the required BFE.

### Neighborhood Cluster Program

This voluntary program will be offered to residents and small neighborhood-serving businesses in certain areas of the City to return and resettle in more sustainable neighborhood clusters. These areas are the ones with the slowest rates of repopulation, lowest natural elevations, and highest risk of future flooding. The program provides funds for both the financial costs of resettlement for single-family homeowners, renters of relocated residences, and small, neighborhood-serving businesses who also want to relocate near the neighborhood cluster, and the technical assistance necessary to contact and assist residents and businesses in the cluster development. All reconstruction will follow FEMA flood guidelines and sustainable/green building practices.

## **Provide Housing Solutions for All to Return**

A suite of policies, programs and projects is designed to provide a range of solutions for all low- and moderate-income residents, both owners and renters. It focuses on the unfilled gaps in current state and federal disaster- and non-disaster related housing programs. It also aims to protect and enhance the City's housing stock by rehabilitating underutilized, abandoned and blighted residential properties throughout the City. The plan also calls upon the federal and local housing authorities to rehabilitate or rebuild a sufficient number of low-income housing units in order to meet the highest sustainable standards, incorporating mixed-income and mixed-uses, and be of a significantly higher density than current HOPE VI policies to establish a critical mass that will support and sustain retail, social services and community programs.

## **Rebuild a Premier, Regional and Neighborhood-serving Health Care Network**

The replacement of "Big Charity" hospital through a joint venture of Louisiana State University and the Office of Veterans Affairs is critical to the redevelopment of the Medical District. These combined teaching, research, clinical and acute care facilities and services represent the critical anchor, along with Tulane Medical Center, of the District's rebirth. Without these facilities, the medical district will not be revived, at least not anywhere near its pre-Katrina economic importance. Without the revitalization of the medical district, the vitality and sustainability of the entire downtown area could be impaired. Projects will also restore primary and preventative care services for all neighborhoods in the City.

## **Re-vision the K-12 Public Education System**

A series of short- and long-term policies, programs, and project are proposed following best practices in physical design, curriculum, and educational standards. It includes projects to restore and rebuild the physical plant to meet the neighborhood-level needs for public education across the City. A reconfiguration of schools as centers of community is also envisioned to provide effective spaces for teaching and learning, as well as a range of community services to meet local needs. The clustering of facilities will allow a more efficient delivery of services and coordination of services and transit, while encouraging creative and efficient land use patterns reflective of established traditional neighborhood development.

## **Restore and Upgrade the Physical and Social Infrastructure of the Entire City**

In addition to these high profile projects and programs, the Citywide Plan provides for the orderly repair, renovation and/or replacement of the physical assets of the City, from the water and sewerage systems, to the streets, police and fire and EMS stations, parks and libraries, health clinics and hospitals, schools, and the facilities and organizations that cultivate the cultural heritage of the City. These investments will be made in accordance with the sector strategies defined in the Plan.

## **Implementing the Plan**

Implementation of the Plan requires strategic, coordinated management as multiple agencies will need to work together collaboratively to make decisions, leverage resources, and coordinate recovery actions. Citywide recovery will also require the full participation of our citizenry, federal and state agency support, and the infusion of capital and resources from the private and non-profit sectors. To accomplish this, the Plan advocates for the formation of Parish-wide Recovery Council, and assigns leadership and support roles to key City agencies to oversee the implementation of policies, programs and projects defined for every Sector of the City's recovery. They include: the Office of the Mayor and executive staff, the City Council, the City Planning Commission, the newly-formed Office of Recovery Management, the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, and other municipal agencies.

The Plan also identifies the staffing needs of those key agencies that are charged with local recovery implementation. This is essential, since the task of recovery and rebuilding is immediate and we must leverage and enhance the capabilities of existing agencies and organizations, rather than invent new ones.

## **Financing the Plan**

Finally, to successfully implement this recovery, New Orleans needs a comprehensive financing strategy that maximizes the use of all major state and federal post-disaster funding programs and identifies new public and private funding sources and strategies. The Plan defines the gaps, and proposes strategies for funding the full recovery need. It also provides the basis for the City and parish agencies to work cooperatively to effectively manage funds and articulate additional needs. There are many scenarios for funding the recovery of New Orleans. All funding scenarios will almost certainly envision a long-term process that will require a very delicate execution to attract a sufficient amount of financing that best serves the recovery process at the lowest cost to the City and its residents and businesses.