

Overview of the UNOP process

CHAPTER 2

The UNOP planning process

The Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) was created to include all neighborhoods in planning the recovery of the city. The objective of this multilevel planning process is to successfully integrate community input and professional planning expertise into a citywide recovery and rebuilding plan.

This planning is led by one Citywide Planning Team, four District Planning Teams and several Neighborhood Planning Teams across New Orleans's 13 planning districts. The UNOP process builds on all completed professional and community planning work in New Orleans to minimize redundancy and maximize efficiency. Key post-Hurricane Katrina planning work has already been completed by the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC), Urban Land Institute (ULI), FEMA, Lambert Advisory and Shedo LLC, and numerous neighborhood groups. UNOP incorporates all of these efforts into a single, unified plan.

The planning process has been conducted under the auspices of the New Orleans Community Support Foundation (NOCSEF), a board made up of six current and past trustees of the Greater New Orleans Foundation. The Unified New Orleans Plan process was established by an initial grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and subsequent donations from the Greater New Orleans Foundation and the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund.

Once completed, this recovery plan will be submitted to the City Planning Commission and then the City Council for formal approval, the Mayor's Office for review, and finally the Louisiana Recovery Authority and other state and federal agencies and institutional and private funding sources. A recovery and rebuilding plan is required to capitalize on federal and state funds for residents and the city to rebuild. The plan will allow city and state officials to coordinate post-disaster recovery more efficiently and effectively and will help New Orleans comply with federal mandates. The plan will also identify critical needs for investment, so that private and public entities may make more informed, coordinated investment decisions in New Orleans.



David Dixon of Goody Clancy addresses community members at the second district meeting.

The final phase of the planning process will result in 13 complete district plans and one citywide plan. The final plan will be submitted to the City Planning Commission for review in late January 2007 and will follow the City’s ratification process shortly afterwards.

District planning process— How the community participated

SOUNDING BOARD

The planning process was structured around four districtwide public meetings that provided significant opportunities for public discussion. In order to expand the opportunity for public involvement, however, the Goody Clancy team established broadly representative sounding boards for each of its planning areas to provide an opportunity for in-depth community review of analysis and recommendations, help provide community-based guidance to the consultant team, help the team disseminate information to the larger community, and help build community interest in the UNOP planning process and participation in the district-wide meetings.

Because of UNOP’s necessarily short time frame and the impossibility of assembling a group that was elected by the community or appointed by elected officials, Goody Clancy sought out the advice of community leaders and created sounding boards that were open to any who wanted to participate. The only requirements were that members attend meetings regularly—approximately every two weeks—and agree to

consider the views of all other participants in the spirit of shared responsibility for recovery.

In downtown members took their roles very seriously and decided to form a more formal steering committee. The Downtown Development District (DDD), and leaders from a number of other organizations worked together to ensure that the steering committee represented an appropriately broad range of downtown perspec-

tives and interests. Working quickly, they helped Goody Clancy organize a steering committee that included historic preservationists; community activists; developers; real estate professionals; members of the tourism, retail, and hospitality sectors; university representatives; residents; and numerous stakeholder bodies, such as the Vieux Carré Commission, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Preservation Resource Center. The full list of participants in steering committee

meetings appears in the Acknowledgments section of this report, although inclusion on this list does not imply attendance at any particular number of meetings, or endorsement of this plan. Roughly 20–25 people attended each steering committee meeting. The full steering committee played an active role in working with the consultant team to develop findings and to communicate information to the larger downtown community. A number of steering committee members noted that this activ-

SOUNDING BOARD MEETING SUMMARY

09/28/06	<p>INTRODUCTION TO UNOP PROJECT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to consultant team • Introductions by Sounding Board members • Objectives of process and timescale • Key issues, challenges, opportunities <p>ISSUES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of (lack of) planning in the city • Need to understand challenges • Recognition of opportunities • Need to focus on “changing culture” • Need to focus on implementation <p>CHALLENGES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous “history of failures” • “Damaged brand” • Inefficiencies in “moving things forward” • Developers/businesses/professionals have left town • Lack of regulation/enforcement • Conversion of neighboring Iberville to mixed use/mixed income/mixed density <p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax/other incentives • Importance of bringing back Canal Street • Historic preservation/character area reinforcement • Unique qualities of French Quarter • Economic Development opportunities in Medical District • Enhanced connectivity • 21st-century buildings
-----------------	--

10/12/06	<p>NEEDS/GOALS/VISION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repair, rehabilitation, re-envisioning (see Ch. 4) • DPZ Charettes for French Quarter/historic districts • Analysis: “what we’ve seen and heard” • Framework: development potential and urban design
10/24/06	<p>SOUTH/NORTH RAMPART ST CORRIDOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new downtown neighborhood • Place for higher density • Mixed-use and mixed-income development • Relationship with Iberville, redevelopment of parking lots, transition of building heights
11/08/06	<p>EMERGING PLAN SUMMARY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An economy growing through innovation • Depending on “creative industries” • Flourishing through connections • Strengthening downtown’s ability to manage itself • Preserving the historic districts • Unlocking restoration and innovation along Canal Street • Expanding inner-city and regional transit • Supporting Medical District growth and change • Creating an internationally significant destination • Strengthening emerging museum cluster • Forge stronger pedestrian connections • Create new, inviting waterfront connections • Double downtown’s residential population (presentation by Laurie Volk, Zimmerman Volk Associates)

12/01/06	<p>REVIEW OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES (PRESENTED BY ERA):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing (some 3,000-4,000 new units downtown) • Canal Street (importance, and challenge, of use of upper levels) • Cultural attraction • Review of emerging project matrix—key project proposals (see Ch.6)
12/15/06	<p>IMPLEMENTATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding role and capacity of DDD • Extending services of DDD-type agency to French Quarter and Medical District • Supporting growth economies in downtown (Medical District and creative economy) • Giving plans the force of law • Advocacy for funding
01/05/07	<p>REVIEWED NEXT STEPS IDENTIFIED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft final plan issued to Steering Committee • Comments sought/discussion held on plan document (both specifics and in general), and proposed changes noted • Further comments to be sent through after the meeting (phone, fax, e-mail) • Invitation for photographs of key elements in report (e.g., poor streets, closed businesses) to be sent through • Key next steps discussed: continuation of Steering Committee, role of existing/new agencies (including DDD)

ity represented the first time that a wide range of downtown interests had met on a regular basis to discuss issues in common. The steering committee decided to continue to meet after the UNOP process is complete to support further planning work.

The DDD acted as coordinator and publicist for the meetings, for which it is due special thanks, as is the Chateau Sonesta Hotel, which hosted the meetings. Invitations to join the committee were issued at each public district-wide meeting in an effort to make the process as inclusive as possible.

The topics covered at each steering committee meeting are identified in the boxes as part of this text.

DISTRICT MEETINGS

Four districtwide public meetings took place, advertised extensively as part of the UNOP publicity program and promoted by stakeholder groups such as the DDD and Vieux Carré Property Owners, Residents and Associates (VCPORA). The meetings were organized around broad UNOP process themes, into which were incorporated aspects of the study at each point. The district meeting format involved an introduction/review, a presentation, and division into smaller “break-out” groups that concentrated on sub-areas or particular themes to ensure that every meeting included more than just general discussion. A member of the consultant team facilitated each small group. Discussion also built on the previous steering committee meeting, seeking out participation from each area to move the planning process forward.

“...we are a great place to create a whole new downtown neighborhood that responds to New Orleans’s need for housing and reinforces diversity...”



“...improved transport is vital to better link neighborhoods, the city and the region....”

“...we need to be able to house our musicians and other creative artists... the Musicians’ Village is a good model...”

“...we MUST preserve our historic buildings... and our heritage...it is the secret to downtown’s strength...”

Quotes from attendees at district meeting #2.

DISTRICT MEETINGS SUMMARY

District Meeting 1

- 10/14/06**
- Introduction to District/Neighborhood Planning team
 - Introduction to UNOP process—why, what, etc.
 - Our preliminary thoughts on the District and constituent parts
 - Goals (see Ch 4.)
 - Reporting back on “what we’ve seen” and “what we’ve heard”
 - Preliminary opportunities and challenges

IN THE BREAK-OUT GROUPS, WE SPLIT BY AREA AND KEY ISSUES RAISED WERE:

CBD/Medical District

- Solutions must have force of law
- Need to encourage mixed income residential—long-term residents (and for Medical District personnel/visitors)
- Identify best music/jazz performance space
- Historic preservation vital
- Importance of ‘walkability’ and connector streets
- Private investment depends on public infrastructure

French Quarter

- Main concerns: street infrastructure, water pressure & noise/vibration from trucks
- Curb ‘Bourbon Street’ tourism
- Need basic services: e.g. post office/boxes, grocers
- Zoning/coding enforcement
- Parking management & transit improvement
- Connections to the river

Warehouse District

- Importance of preservation, pedestrian scale, mass/height, frontages
- Need more local shops/facilities and community services in condo. buildings
- Control growth to not adversely impact on heritage/amenity
- Transport/pedestrian connections—possible light rail (recognize “market” needed)?

Lafayette Square/Picayune Place

- Not go back to ‘skid row’
- Connections: two-way streets, street cars, pedestrian links
- Residential development in scale, with more local businesses
- Public plan—with the force of law
- Heritage globes on lamp standards

District Meeting 2

- 11/11/06**
- Update on UNOP process so far
 - Introduction to scenarios
 - Themes as per Steering Committee meeting 11/08/06 (see above)
 - Other themes:
 - > “Where development might occur”
 - > 2,000–3,000 units of new housing
 - > Neighborhood parks to catalyze development
 - > Street hierarchy
 - > Building height transitions
 - > Mix of heights and density

IN THE BREAK-OUT GROUPS, WE SPLIT BY TOPICS AND THE KEY ISSUES RAISED WERE:

Housing

- Need mixed income housing (too much high end)
- Mechanisms for/management of affordable housing
- Housing needed in Canal, for Medical District
- Reduce car dependency, increase retail as part of housing
- Need strong preservation and strong code enforcement

Transportation

- Repairs/studies needed (e.g. traffic patterns)—short term
- Trucks & service vehicles needs addressing
- Bus transit—needs improving for workers
- Regional role is important, economic development and access related
- Evacuation routes need to be considered alongside transport funding

Cultural Activities

- Enforcement & improvements on Bourbon Street, more rehearsal space needed, use existing theaters
- Need better management of tourism—and to make city safe and clean for tourists
- Affordable housing for cultural economy workers needed
- Preservation needs more staffing
- Parking needs to be better for attracting locals and tourists

Streetscape and Public Realm

- Increased parks/plazas, appropriate tree planting
- No parking on neutral grounds
- Need toilets, bike racks, and better street furniture
- More sidewalk dining
- Improved riverfront connections

District Meeting 3

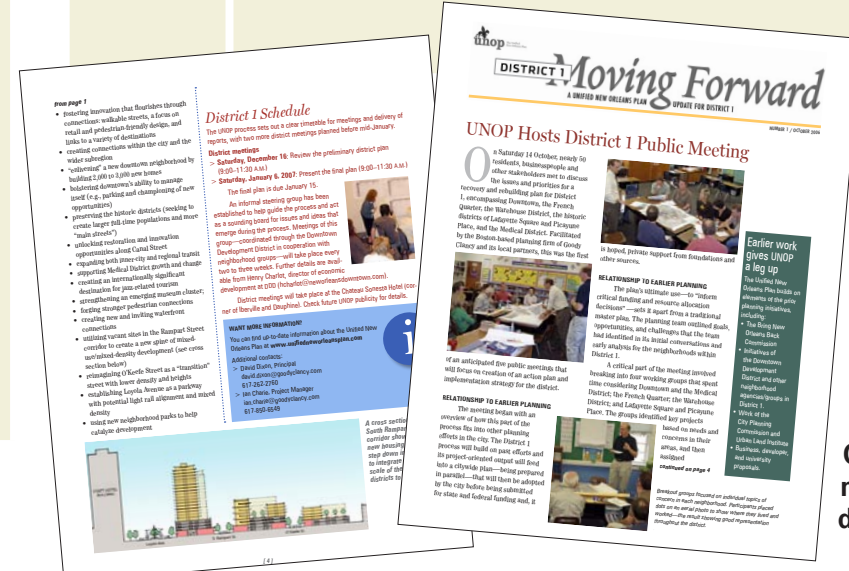
- 12/16/06**
- Update on UNOP process
 - Repopulation update
 - Recap of vision, core opportunities/challenges, key projects
 - Summary of each sector
 - Implementation strategies: (see Steering Committee Meeting 12/15/06, above)

This meeting did not divide into break-out groups as a strong group discussion took place, including implementation steps, above; need for getting political buy-in (see Ch.7); and prospect of the Steering Committee continuing to meet post-UNOP

District Meeting 4

- 01/06/07**
- FINAL DRAFT PLAN AND NEXT STEPS**
- What is downtown
 - Downtown’s role in recovery
 - Reinforcing New Orleans’s differences: preservation and innovation
 - Planning framework
 - Implementation strategy
 - Next steps

The meeting did not break into groups as a useful discussion developed through the presentation. This dwelt on: possible expanded role for DDD/other agency, gaining political support (staff members for Councilpersons James Carter and Stacy Head were in attendance), continued role of the Steering Committee after the UNOP process closes, setting up a Planning Advisory Council and other Next Steps.



Goody Clancy newsletters regarding district meetings.

Following each districtwide meeting, a newsletter summarizing its content was posted on the UNOP website, along with any PowerPoint presentations from the meeting. Copies of newsletters were sent to participants and other district stakeholders. Printed copies of newsletters were also made available at subsequent steering committee meetings. Some 35–45 stakeholders attended each of these meetings.

Four meetings were prescribed by the UNOP process. They are summarized in the box at the top of this page.

CHARRETTES

As part of the Goody Clancy district planning team, Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (DPZ) was appointed as neighborhood planners to lead charrettes that supplemented the district-level planning work. Two charrettes—one for the French Quarter and one for the Warehouse, Lafayette Square, and Picayune Place historic districts—were planned with a focus on management, infrastructure, land use/zoning conflicts, historic preservation, urban design quality issues, and associated implementation recommendations. DPZ promoted, arranged, and led the charrettes, with Goody Clancy team members in attendance to contribute key opening, mid-point and closing presentations/reviews. The week-long charrettes, with wide-ranging multidisciplinary input from DPZ designers and planners, took place:

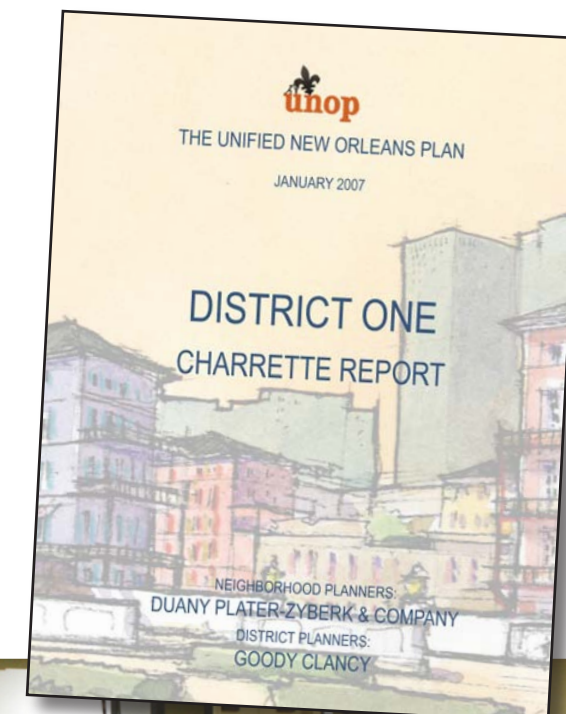
- **November 2–8 for the historic districts**
- **November 5–10 for the French Quarter**

A broad cross section of stakeholders from both subdistricts took part in the charrettes. DPZ reports on the charrettes appear in the Appendix.

SUMMARY

The sounding board process was organized to meet multiple objectives:

- to be transparent and inclusive
- to build relationships and encourage the exchange of information in two directions (from and to planners and stakeholders)
- to further broaden the input provided at district-wide meetings, guide the planners as they began to shape their report, and help establish a steering committee for soliciting stakeholder feedback
- to help integrate the citywide UNOP process together with community-based planning
- to help establish a vehicle that would have momentum after completion of the UNOP process to lobby for change and provide pressure for project implementation as part of the recovery process



Andres Duany leads an interim charrette presentation with downtown community members. (Photo: DPZ District 1 Charrette Report)

