Community Congress III
Discussion Guide

January 20, 2007
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Overview of Discussion Guide

More than 2,500 New Orleanians came together on December 2, 2006, to shape the future of the city they love. Citizens in New Orleans, Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Dallas, Houston, and 16 other cities spent the day discussing the challenges facing the recovery of New Orleans and coming up with priorities for rebuilding.

From amongst the thousands of ideas and priorities expressed at Community Congress II, four strong messages emerged about what is critical for the city to recover. This discussion guide describes how the UNOP citywide recovery plan responds to each of these core public messages. The guide is NOT a detailed description of the contents of the unified plan; rather, it shows how the plan addresses the priorities expressed by citizens during Community Congress II.

To support discussions about what comes next, this guide also provides a brief overview of some of the different organizations and institutions involved with implementation, as well as options for how continued citizen involvement may be supported.
Introduction to Unified New Orleans Plan

A Unified Plan for Recovery and Rebuilding

The Unified New Orleans Plan is a five-month planning process established by the Mayor, City Council and City Planning Commission to produce a unified recovery and rebuilding plan for New Orleans.

The effort to plan New Orleans’ recovery began shortly after Katrina with the work of the Bring New Orleans Back Commission, which identified citywide needs and issues that should be addressed on a short-term and long-term basis. Later in 2006, thousands of citizens and business owners worked together to define the visions, goals and objectives for the repair, recovery and rebuilding of their devastated neighborhoods and districts. Many of these efforts were supported by the City Council’s Rebuilding Plan (the Lambert plan) which resulted in a list of recovery projects for the most devastated areas of the City – submitted to the City Council in October 2006.

The needs, goals and recommendations of these and other planning efforts have been folded into the development of the city’s unified plan.

Elements of the Unified New Orleans Plan

The Unified New Orleans Plan includes three main elements: (1) citywide and district assessments of New Orleans’ recovery to date, (2) a citywide recovery plan, which is an action-oriented menu of strategies and projects for the city’s recovery, and (3) 13 district plans that capture the community’s priorities in all 13 of the City’s planning districts.

The citywide recovery plan itself – on which Community Congress III is concerned – will consist of three elements as well: (1) a strategic recovery framework that guides how recovery projects and policies should be applied across the city as well as plans for the recovery of each of the City’s major sectors, (2) an implementation plan that defines how public agencies should work together to manage the City’s recovery, and (3) a financial strategy for funding recovery activities.

For more information about the Unified New Orleans Plan, visit www.unifiedneworleansplan.org.
Safety from Future Flooding

At Community Congress II, You Said:

- Category 5 flood protection must be built faster\(^1\) and wetlands must be restored\(^2\) to protect the City from future storms.
- Help residents take personal responsibility for reducing flood risk by setting voluntary standards for rebuilding stronger and more safely, and providing incentives to enable them to reach those standards.\(^3\)

How Does the Unified New Orleans Plan Respond to What You Said?

**Recommendation #1: Call for Category 5 Flood Protection**

The unified plan forcefully advocates for the Army Corps of Engineers and the Sewerage and Water Board to provide stronger levees and floodwalls, as well as more (and more reliable) pumping capacity. Full funding and faster implementation should be guaranteed for the repair and upgrade of the current levee system by June 2007, the construction of new systems (including levees, floodwalls, pumping stations and floodgates) by June 2010, and new systems to protect against Category 5 hurricanes (including coastal restoration and surge barriers) as soon as possible.

**Recommendation #2: Wetland Protection and Restoration**

The unified plan recommends that the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority’s Master Plan be implemented in order to reduce the impact of storms on New Orleans by redeveloping the coastal wetlands and stabilizing the shorelines.

**Recommendation #3: Enforce FEMA Flood Elevation Guidelines**

The unified plan recommends that the FEMA Base Flood Elevation guidelines be strictly enforced across the city. These guidelines do not apply to homes that have either already been rebuilt, have received building permits, or received less than 50% damage. Increased staffing will be needed for the City to expand enforcement of the guidelines. Programs to assist homeowners in elevating their homes are described below.
Recommendation #4: “Elevate New Orleans” Incentive Program

The unified plan recommends the creation of a voluntary program to “Elevate New Orleans.” Residential property owners will be encouraged to voluntarily elevate their homes through “gap financing” incentives. Gap financing is public funding that closes the gap between the funds being provided by FEMA/LRA and the actual cost of elevating a home.

Recommendation #5: Incentives to Reconstruct Slab-on-Grade Houses

The unified plan recommends that voluntary incentives be offered to residential property owners whose “slab-on-grade” homes were flooded in order to encourage them to rebuild their homes in a more traditional New Orleans style, either on piers, chain-link walls, or with first floor basements, so that their first floors are above floodwaters.

Recommendation #6: Floodproof Essential Public Facilities and Equipment

In addition to elevating or relocating structures, the unified plan recommends that public buildings – like hospitals, police and fire stations, emergency medical facilities, and courts – be prepared to withstand high winds and rising flood waters. These steps to “harden” facilities include flood proofing, providing safe "houses" for pumping stations that will allow operations to continue under the harshest conditions, and moving back-up generators and computers from basements to upper floors.

Recommendation #7: Explore the Use of Secondary Flood Protection Systems

The unified plan recommends exploring the use of a secondary levee system to serve as a back up if the primary levee system fails. Secondary systems may include interior levees, berms and pumping stations in specific areas of the city at the highest risk of flooding.
Rebuilding Safe and Stable Neighborhoods

At Community Congress II, You Said:

- Empower residents to rebuild stable and safe neighborhoods through financial incentives and the best possible information, rather than mandating where people can live.\(^4\)

How Does the Unified New Orleans Plan Respond to What You Said?

**Recommendation #1: Voluntary Incentives to Stabilize Neighborhoods**

The unified plan recommends the creation of an entirely voluntary, incentive-based program to promote safe and stable neighborhoods by encouraging people to live near one another. Residents who own properties in areas of the city that have been slow to repopulate and have high risks of flooding would be offered funding to voluntarily move to an area nearby where a cluster of residents have already moved back or are moving back. The proposed program would cover 100% of the costs for the new homes by filling the gap between “Road Home” and the actual cost of relocating. It would also cover temporary living expenses and relocation costs. The program would assist homeowners in identifying locations where they can live close to former neighbors on higher ground.

The unified plan recommends that under the program the City would identify areas with slower repopulation rates and higher levels of flood risk. Neighborhood residents from these areas who are interested in participating in the program may choose to work with the City to decide where they would like to relocate based on where people have already begun to rebuild, the location of existing infrastructure, and flood risk.

Small businesses that serve neighborhoods that move to other areas would be provided with assistance in order to relocate along with the cluster of former residents. Renters who had been living in properties whose owners choose to participate in the program would be provided with assistance to relocate.
**Recommendation #2: Redevelop Underutilized, Low Risk Areas of the City**

The unified plan recommends that the City Planning Commission and other responsible agencies encourage and facilitate the redevelopment of higher elevation areas of the City that were underutilized prior to Katrina. This would be accomplished by packaging and marketing existing programs and investing in infrastructure and community services that will help accommodate additional population.

**Recommendation #3: Speed Up the Re-Use of Pre-Katrina Blighted Properties**

The unified plan recommends that the City speed up the transfer of blighted and abandoned properties to private owners or nonprofit developers in order to make more land and buildings available for housing in areas with lower risks of flooding. This would be accomplished through stricter enforcement of housing codes.

**Recommendation #4: Prevent Post-Katrina Blight through Incentives and Enforcement**

The unified plan recommends that the City fight post-Katrina blight through financial incentives that help rebuild housing that has been damaged, as well as the strong enforcement of housing codes in cases where properties have been abandoned or owners choose to not redevelop.

**Recommendation #5: Explore Alternative Ideas for Addressing Blighted Properties**

The unified plan recommends the exploration and development of alternative programs to redevelop blighted properties, like the “lot next door” program – which gives neighbors the first chance to buy an abandoned property – and additional mechanisms for remediation of blighted properties. These should be implemented in the midterm, after other policies and programs to stabilize neighborhoods have been given a chance to succeed.
Affordable Housing

At Community Congress II, You Said:

- Create housing for low-income families, public housing residents and renters so that everyone can come home to New Orleans who wants to do so.⁵
- Fund the development of low- and moderate-income public housing and link housing to job training and support services.⁶

How Does the Unified New Orleans Plan Respond to What You Said?

**Recommendation #1: Comprehensive Strategy for Pre-Katrina Public Housing Residents**

The unified plan calls for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to enact a comprehensive strategy to support the housing needs of all pre-Katrina public housing residents. Housing options must be provided to ensure the rapid return of displaced residents. A sufficient number of housing units must be made available to accommodate all displaced former public housing tenants. Low income housing should be rehabilitated or rebuilt to the highest standards and incorporate mixed-income and potentially mixed-uses. Redevelopment plans should account for the needs of seniors and people with disabilities.

**Recommendation #2: Re-examine and Speed Up “Road Home” Allocations**

The unified plan calls for faster implementation of the “Road Home” program in Orleans Parish. Additionally, the plan recommends that the calculations used to determine the amount of rebuilding funds provided to homeowners and loans for small rental repairs should be examined to ensure that they reflect the true cost of post-Katrina repair.
Recommendation #3: Enact Inclusionary Zoning to Create Affordable Housing Units

The unified plan recommends the passage of regulations that require all developers of new housing in New Orleans to include a certain percentage of their units at affordable, below-market rates. This will increase the amount of affordable housing and spread new units across the city to create more mixed-income communities.

Recommendation #4: Create More Rental Housing within New Orleans’ Existing Stock of “Single” and “Duplex” Homes

The unified plan recommends the creation of more available rental units by offering low-interest loans for people to redevelop or purchase single and duplex homes. Rent that is collected on the second unit of the two-unit “duplex” buildings may be used to pay back the low-interest loans. Approximately 40 percent of all housing in Greater New Orleans are duplex houses. These duplexes provide both affordable homeownership and rental opportunities at the same time.

Recommendation #5: Homebuyer Assistance Programs

The unified plan recommends an overall suite of homebuyer assistance programs for low- and moderate-income residents. Included in this program are “soft second” funds, which are used to assist homebuyers by covering the cost of down payments, closing costs and to buy down interest rates. A marketing campaign must be conducted to raise awareness about existing programs to assist homebuyers.

Recommendation #6: Home Rehabilitation Loans

The unified plan recommends offering low-interest loans to low- to moderate-income homeowners for the renovation of homes unaffected by Katrina, which are ineligible for “Road Home” loans.
Public Services

At Community Congress II, You Said:

- Reopen and rebuild public facilities (like schools and healthcare centers) based on repopulation and recovery rates.  
- Use temporary and mobile facilities in less populated areas and make sure that a plan is in place to develop permanent facilities as neighborhoods repopulate.  
- Where possible, public facilities should be combined under one roof to increase efficiency and lower costs. Schools should serve as multi-use community centers.  
- Improve the quality of schools.

How Does the Unified New Orleans Plan Respond to What You Said?

**Recommendation #1: Provide Immediate Access to Services in Low Population/High Risk Areas**

The unified plan recommends the use of temporary facilities to provide immediate access to health, education and other services in areas that have been slow to repopulate. In these areas with a high risk of flooding and slow rates of repopulation, provide modular education facilities and neighborhood health clinics to ensure that immediate needs are met. Develop a transition plan to close temporary facilities and open permanent facilities as neighborhood populations return and flood protection measures are strengthened.

**Recommendation #2: Repair & Reopen Facilities Based on Repopulation & Recovery Rates**

The unified plan recommends that permanent education, health and other public facilities be reopened based on repopulation and recovery rates. Newly opened facilities must be floodproofed to withstand future storms.
**Recommendation #3: Establish Schools as Community Centers**

The unified plan recommends reconfiguring schools to serve as community centers that provide effective spaces for teaching and learning, as well as a range of community services to meet local needs. Whether housed in existing facilities or in newly constructed ones, these neighborhood-based community centers may include early childhood education, kindergarten-8th grade classes, high school learning centers, adult education centers, recreation facilities, and meeting spaces.

**Recommendation #4: Develop a Citywide Network of State-of-the-Art Police Substations**

The unified plan recommends the creation of a network of police substations that are closer to communities to improve response times, increase interaction with residents, and help people to feel more secure. Each substation will be fully equipped with the latest technology.

**Recommendation #5: Renovate and Repair Police Headquarters and Other Facilities**

The unified plan recommends returning the New Orleans Police Department to a centralized operational base by renovating and repairing the Department Headquarters. Additionally, repair and renovate all seven of the damaged district headquarters buildings throughout the city to re-establish district level command and control as well as administrative functions. Also repair and renovate the city’s crime lab, special operations unit and emergency communications center (9-1-1).

**Recommendation #6: Renovate Fire Department Facilities**

The unified plan recommends the approval of projects to renovate and reopen fire department facilities through FEMA reimbursements.

**Recommendation #7: Redevelop Neighborhood Based Health Centers/Clinics**

The unified plan recommends that primary health care and preventative care services be restored through the recovery of neighborhood level clinics and health centers.
Moving from Planning to Action

What Comes Next?

The following steps will take place after Community Congress III to adopt the unified plan.

**Community Support Organization and Foundation:** The unified plan will first be presented to the organizations that have been responsible for overseeing the process – the Community Support Organization and the Community Support Foundation. The final public meeting of the Community Support Organization at which the Unified New Orleans Plan will be presented is January 25.

**City Planning Commission:** If and when the plan is approved by the Community Support Foundation, it will be submitted to the City Planning Commission for review. The Planning Commission is currently scheduled to hold public meetings for input – on February 22 and March 7 – before voting on a recovery plan.

**City Council and Mayor:** The City Council and Mayor will have final review of the City’s recovery plan. If and when the plan is approved, it will become the City’s official blueprint for recovery.

**Louisiana Recovery Authority:** The City’s recovery plan will be submitted to the LRA, as well as other public and private entities, to solicit implementation funding for appropriate recovery activities.
Government’s Role in Implementation

Introduction

Successful implementation of the Unified New Orleans Plan will require close and unprecedented coordination and cooperation between dozens of local, state and federal agencies and government officials. In addition to proposing a set of policies and projects to shape New Orleans’ recovery, the unified plan also suggests responsibility for action and implementation to these agencies. A brief summary of a few of the entities’ proposed responsibilities is presented below.

Citywide Recovery Council

Role:
- A new organization will be created that is comprised of all major agencies – inside and outside of city government – involved with the recovery to ensure cooperation and communication. The Citywide Recovery Council will be chaired by the Mayor’s Executive Director of Recovery Management.

Responsibilities:
- Serve as single “recovery voice” for the entire city
- Set priorities for recovery and manage recovery resources
- Lead coordination of recovery-funded agencies and approve recovery-implementation efforts

Mayor of New Orleans

Role:
- Provide leadership for recovery efforts

Responsibilities:
- Lead the City’s requests for funding at all levels and from all sources, including state and federal
- Use leadership to gain full commitment from city agencies to constructively participate in Citywide Recovery Council and to champion and manage major recovery initiatives
- Promote integrity and transparency in all recovery matters
Executive Director for Recovery Management

**Role:**
- Manage recovery activities and deliver key recovery initiatives.

**Responsibilities:**
- Develop action plans for coordinating and managing agencies' recovery activities
- Develop a tracking system to obtain and provide residents with comprehensive, up-to-date information about the status of recovery efforts
- Coordinate with national and local non-governmental partners to provide recovery assistance

New Orleans City Council

**Role:**
- Provide legislative authority to recovery-related initiatives. The co-chairs of the City Council Recovery Committee will serve on the Citywide Recovery Council

**Responsibilities:**
- Champion key recovery initiatives and approve city budget on recovery matters
- Provide leadership to support the implementation of district-level priorities
- Accelerate changes to the City's charter to address recovery actions

New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA)

**Role:**
- Manage the City's inventory of blighted, abandoned and acquired properties to stabilize neighborhoods and foster redevelopment

**Responsibilities:**
- Manage, utilize and/or dispose of the City's existing inventory of blighted and abandoned properties
- Manage, utilize and/or dispose of any additional properties that the City acquires through the Road Home program, donations, or other voluntary land acquisition programs
- Work with Community Development Corporations that are formed by District and neighborhood planning groups to redevelop properties
City Planning Commission

Role:
- Prepare and recommend the adoption of a recovery plan for the City of New Orleans

Responsibilities:
- Incorporate the unified plan as approved into the official citywide recovery plan
- Revise and update the City’s Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance
- Participate in the preparation of a hazard-mitigation plan to respond to future disasters

State of Louisiana

Role:
- Assist with and fund the City of New Orleans’ recovery efforts

Responsibilities:
- Develop a framework with the City on the use of federal funds consistent with the unified plan and citywide recovery plan
- Enact tax incentives and business retention plan
- Enact planning-enabling statutes

United States Government

Role:
- Assist with and fund the City of New Orleans’ recovery efforts

Responsibilities:
- Evaluate federal funding allocation based on recovery needs of New Orleans
- Provide waivers on restrictions for the use of federal funds where appropriate
- Provide FEMA flood maps
- Army Corps of Engineers to develop long-term funding and project management plan for Category-5 levee protection
- Congress to ensure adequate funding and oversight for the Army Corps to complete flood protection plans and projects on time
The Public’s Role in Implementation

Introduction

For the unified plan to be successful, it will be critical for citizens to remain involved with the process. In the short term, citizens need to express their priorities to city leaders as they consider adopting the plan. Over the longer term, citizens need to do their part to act on their priorities and to hold city leaders accountable.

Objectives for Ongoing Citizen Involvement

- **Information**: Provide timely information about the city’s recovery
- **Outreach**: Establish networks to reach out to New Orleanians at home and in the diaspora to keep citizens up to date about the status of recovery and provide them with an opportunity to share feedback
- **Input**: Create opportunities for citizen input on recovery progress and revisit recovery priorities over time
- **Accountability**: Establish a visible and public mechanism for measuring the success of the unified plan and holding local, state and federal government agencies accountable for its implementation

Options for Supporting Continued Citizen Involvement

- **Recovery Clearinghouse**: Develop a recovery clearinghouse to provide information about the city’s recovery and the progress of implementation of the unified plan
- **Neighborhood Association Network**: Create a network of neighborhood associations to keep citizens involved, disseminate information and advocate on behalf of their needs.
- **Diaspora Coalitions**: Create and provide funding for networks of individuals and groups in the diaspora to keep citizens involved, disseminate information and advocate on behalf of their needs
- **Oversight Organization**: Create an independent organization led by community representatives that is tasked with providing oversight over implementation of the plan and engaging citizens in implementation
- **Citywide Recovery Council**: Task the Citywide Recovery Council with keeping citizens informed about the recovery process and providing a mechanism for public accountability
- **Community Coalitions**: Create community coalitions across New Orleans with elected community representatives to advocate on behalf of their community and provide oversight on the recovery process.
- **Community Development Corporations**: Form organizations to lead redevelopment efforts in their Districts
- **Leadership Training**: Build citizen capacity to play leadership roles in the community
End Notes

1 Across all rebuilding priorities expressed at Community Congress II, Category 5 flood protection received the strongest support. Within all flood protection options, 58% of participants said Category 5 flood protection was one of the three most important options to pursue.

2 Across all rebuilding priorities, taking a more holistic approach to flood protection, which includes wetlands restoration, received the third highest vote count. Within the area of flood protection, 39% said that it was one of the three most important options to pursue.

3 63% of participants supported financial incentives to reduce flood risk while only 23% opposed this option. Participants were also very supportive of standards for reducing risk and an option that provided standards while giving people choices received the third highest support across all flood protection options.

4 The option receiving the strongest support to create more stable neighborhoods was offering incentives for neighbors to purchase blighted properties. Participants expressed strong opposition to enforcing where residents can live with 58% opposing vs 31% in support. 65% of participant supported offering financial incentives for rebuilding near one another vs. 22% in opposition. 63% supported financial incentives for reducing flood risks vs. 23% in opposition.

5 Creating homeownership opportunities for low-income and public housing residents without concentrating poverty received the most support of affordable housing options. Making housing for evacuees a priority received strong support.

6 53% of participants supported funding for low and moderate-income public housing with 36% opposed. Connecting public housing with job training and other support also received strong support.

7 72% of participants supported opening and rebuilding health and education facilities based on repopulation and recovery rates vs. 19% opposed. Participants expressed mild opposition to locating and staffing health and education facilities evenly throughout the city (41% in support vs. 51% opposed).

8 The two options receiving the greatest public support in the area of “other public services” were to place main stations where people are and satellite/mobile stations in low population areas, and to develop a plan to increase services as populations grow.

9 Combining public facilities received strong support for education and health (68% vs. 23% in opposition) and “other services” (65% vs. 25% in opposition).

10 Improving school quality received the second highest support across all recovery priorities.