

Preliminary Report UPDATED

Community Congress III January 20, 2007

New Orleans, Atlanta, Dallas & Houston



Nearly 1,300 New Orleanians gathered for Community Congress III, a large-scale public meeting that took place simultaneously in New Orleans, Atlanta, Dallas, and Houston. Citizens displaced to Baton Rouge were bused to and from New Orleans to participate in the meeting. This unique interactive meeting connected New Orleanians at home with friends and neighbors who have not yet made it home through the use of Internet webcast technology.

Community Congress III was the public's collective opportunity to review and give final input on the draft Unified New Orleans Plan before it is sent to city leaders. The discussion guide used at the meeting summarized draft recommendations from the Citywide recovery plan and served as the basis for table discussions.

The Unified New Orleans Plan process was established by the Mayor, the City Council, and the City Planning Commission. UNOP is funded by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, Greater New Orleans Foundation, Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund, and DaimlerChrysler.



Photo: Jim Belfon, Gulf South Photography Project

Community Congress II and III have been organized and facilitated by AmericaSpeaks, a non partisan, non-profit organization.

Who Attended Community Congress III?

Participants shared their demographic information to see how well they represent the diversity of pre-Katrina New Orleans. When available, participants' demographics are compared to Pre-Katrina New Orleans.

<u>I am Participating in...</u>	<u>Jan 20th -</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Jan 20th -</u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>	
Atlanta	5%	15 to 19	6%	7.0%	
Houston	19%	20 to 34	10%	22.6%	
Dallas	11%	35 to 44	12%	14.8%	
New Orleans (but I currently live in Baton Rouge)	3%	45 to 54	24%	13.1%	
New Orleans	62%	55 to 64	29%	7.8%	
		Over 65	18%	11.7%	
<u>I have participated in these UNOP activities</u>	<u>Jan 20th -</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Jan 20th -</u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>	
District Planning Meetings	50%	African American/Black	55%	67.3%	
Community Congress I (October 28, 2006)	23%	Asian American	4%	2.3%	
Community Congress II (December 2, 2006)	55%	Caucasian/White	34%	28.1%	
A hearing - City Council, Planning Commission	23%	Hispanic/Latino	2%	3.1%	
Student Congress	2%	Native American	1%	0.2%	
Lambert Plan Meetings	26%	More than one race	3%	1.3%	
Bring New Orleans Back Meetings	44%	Other	1%	1.0%	
Others	57%				
<u>Pre-Katrina Residence</u>	<u>Jan 20th -</u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Jan 20th -</u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>
District 1	3%	1.4%	Less than \$20,000	24%	35%
District 2	9%	9.8%	\$20,000 - \$39,999	21%	24%
District 3	15%	13.8%	\$40,000 - \$59,999	14%	15%
District 4	8%	16.4%	\$60,000 - \$74,999	8%	7%
District 5	7%	5.3%	More than \$75,000	22%	19%
District 6	11%	9.1%	Don't know/prefer not to answer	11%	N/A
District 7	6%	8.5%			
District 8	8%	4.0%			
District 9	16%	16.8%			
District 10	7%	2.7%			
District 11	3%	0.4%			
District 12	4%	11.5%			
District 13	3%	0.2%			

What Happened at Community Congress III?

The meeting focused on presenting the major elements of the draft UNOP Citywide plan, including the ways in which the plan was influenced by the priorities identified by citizens at Community Congress II on December 2nd. Participants began the day-long conversation by sharing an experience that has most inspired them in the recovery and rebuilding process. The next four discussions focused on reviewing and providing feedback on the way the citywide recovery plan responds to the strong messages expressed at Community Congress II: 1) Safety from Future Flooding; 2) Rebuilding Safe and Stable Neighborhoods; 3) Affordable Housing; and 4) Public Services. Citizens then weighed in on ten other draft recommendations that will be a part of the citywide recovery plan. Finally, participants reviewed and identified new options to ensure that citizens are involved in the implementation of the unified plan.

Participants at Community Congress III were divided into small groups of 8-10, each with its own facilitator. Throughout the day, the tables deliberated on recommendations from the plan and their comments were captured with laptop computers. The “theme team” reviewed the feedback from all of the tables in all sites simultaneously and reported the most common ideas back within minutes. Then using keypads, the participants reviewed and prioritized these ideas to develop a clear plan for action. The results from the polls were reported instantly to the group.

What Has Inspired You?

Participants began the day by sharing an experience in the recovery and rebuilding process that has inspired them.

The following themes emerged from the table conversations (not listed in any order):

- Seeing people rebuild their houses – “neighbors helping neighbors” and new neighborhood leaders emerging
- The march against violence
- Our faith, trust in God, and the strength of the church communities, and public service
- The overall level of *diverse* public participation, volunteerism
- The spirit and will of the people in New Orleans and around the country that have come together to help
- “Children have been an inspiration”
- “Everyone came back despite all logic because there is something special about this city” - “New Orleans is home”
- New Orleans is “a family of communities: people; God, humanity, my family”
- “Seeing growth and progress every time I come back to the city”
- The “positive attitudes of people who have lost so much”
- The hope of rebuilding “better than before”
- The “new belief that my voice can make a difference”
- The beauty of the area coming back – plants, trees & birds
- The unique culture of the city – our food, music and art
- THE SAINTS!!

Safety from Future Flooding

One of the strong messages that came from Community Congress II was the need to build Category 5 flood protection faster, and to restore the wetlands to protect the City from future storms. At the same time, participants said that they need leaders to set voluntary standards for rebuilding the city stronger and more safely to help citizens take personal responsibility for reducing flood risk. They also said that incentives should be provided to enable residents to meet those standards.

Participants reviewed and provided feedback on what they liked and what concerned them about the seven recommendations in the draft UNOP plan.

What Do You Like About the Recommendations?

The following themes emerged from the table conversations and are listed in order of priority based on keypad voting*:

1. Recommendation # 1 is priority # 1: emphasis on Category 5 Flood protection (80%)
2. Focus of wetlands restoration – it is essential (68%)
3. The incentives for elevating homes (35%)
4. Combining voluntary incentives with good information (32%)
4. Flood proof essential public facilities (32%)
5. The comprehensive approach to recommendations (24%)

What Concerns You About the Recommendations?

The following themes emerged from the table conversations and are listed in order of priority based on keypad voting*:

1. Bad governance could undercut speed and fairness of implementation (59%)
2. Focus on effective levees over elevation (52%)
3. Where is the money for incentives? Is 100% of cost being financed? (48%)
4. Unclear guidelines and red tape (example: How will incentives be distributed?) (37%)
5. Elevating homes creates an access problem for elderly & disabled (29%)
6. Gap between 2007 and 2010 - “2010 is too long to wait for new systems” (26%)
7. Visual appearance – elevating structures will destroy character of neighborhoods (14%)
8. Elevation equals increased wind risk (11%)

Thank You to Our Funders

Community Congress II and III would not have been possible without the support of:

Carnegie Corporation of New York, Case Foundation, City of Houston/George R. Brown Convention Center, Ford Foundation, Greater New Orleans Foundation, Louisiana Recovery Fund, Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Rebuilding Safe and Stable Neighborhoods

Community Congress II participants also said that leaders should empower residents to rebuild stable and safe neighborhoods through financial incentives and the best possible information, rather than mandating where people can live.

Participants reviewed and provided feedback on what they liked and what concerned them about the five recommendations to rebuild New Orleans' neighborhoods so they are safe and stable.

What Do You Like About the Recommendations?

The following themes emerged from the table conversations and are listed in order of priority based on keypad voting*:

1. That renters are included in these programs (50%)
2. The financial incentives for safer, denser neighborhoods – “clustering is good” (48%)
3. Programs manage blight and promote reuse of properties (46%)
4. The incentives in the plan, esp. funding (37%)
5. That the programs are voluntary (31%)
6. The overall neighborhood stabilization plan is good (21%)
7. Clustering provides closer access to facilities and services (18%)
8. This creates the potential for more green space (15%)
8. Clustering can create real communities (15%)

What Concerns You About the Recommendations?

The following themes emerged from the table conversations and are listed in order of priority based on keypad voting*:

1. Must preserve affordable housing and mitigate gentrification (38%)
2. “We didn’t handle blight well before; can we now?” (34%)
3. How do we ensure the integrity of the political process? (33%)
4. “What happens to people that stay in high risk, low populations areas?”(30%)
5. “What resources will be made available to implement this program?” (28%)
5. Need to ensure that this results in quality, strategic planning (28%)
6. Need more details about the mechanics of the cluster program (27%)
6. “How does this help reduce crime?” (27%)
7. “How would renters be impacted?” (23%)
8. “Does the program give preference to local developers?” (16%)

Affordable Housing

Another one of the strong messages that came from Community Congress II was that leaders need to 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. Participants also said that it is important to fund the development of low- and moderate-income public housing and link housing to job training and support services.

Participants reviewed and provided feedback on what they liked and what concerned them about the six recommendations to create affordable housing for all New Orleanians.

What Do You Like About the Recommendations?

The following themes emerged from the table conversations and are listed in order of priority based on keypad voting*:

1. Reexamining & speeding up Road Home (50%)
2. Good to tie jobs & job training to public housing residents (49%)
3. Building mixed-income communities to prevent concentration of poverty & violence (48%)
4. Homeownership assistance “is empowering” & “will help build communities” (44%)
5. Providing housing opportunities for all – public housing residents, homeowners, renters (40%)
6. Utilizing existing housing stock – esp. duplexes to provide affordable rental units (34%)
7. Programs encourages displaced people to return home – esp. public housing residents (18%)

What Concerns You about the Recommendations?

The following themes emerged from the table conversations*.

1. Strengthen Recommendation #2 – Road Home program needs full overhaul (55%)
2. Skyrocketing cost of living (taxes, insurance, utilities) decreases affordability & slows recovery (52%)
3. We need affordable housing immediately (41%)
4. Need a new model of public housing – “public housing cannot return to pre-Katrina status” (39%)
4. Not enough good quality jobs to support rebuilding & maintaining housing (39%)
5. Make design guidelines specific to New Orleans, not generic “everywhere USA” (29%)
6. Needs of moderate-income people who do not qualify for assistance are not addressed in plan (28%)

Public Services

Another strong message that came from Community Congress II was the need to reopen and rebuild public facilities (like schools and health centers) based on repopulation and recovery rates. Participants recommended using temporary and mobile facilities, which could be combined, in less populated areas with a plan to develop permanent facilities as neighborhoods repopulate. Participants also wanted to improve the quality of New Orleans' schools.

Participants reviewed and provided feedback on what they liked and what concerned them about the seven recommendations in the draft UNOP plan.

What Do You Like About the Recommendations?

The following themes emerged from the table conversations and are listed in order of priority based on keypad voting*:

1. More health centers and clinics are based in communities (61%)
2. Multi-use facilities are good - schools as community centers can provide expanded recreation services to the public; (59%)
3. Police and fire are prioritized (44%)
4. Access to services is provided immediately through temporary, mobile service centers (36%)
5. "Comprehensive nature of the plan addressing status of all neighborhoods" (34%)
6. Police services are brought through substations (28%)
7. Services are repaired and rebuilt based upon population (23%)

What Concerns You about the Recommendations?

The following themes emerged from the table conversations and are listed in order of priority based on keypad voting*:

1. We need not only clinics, but also full service medical facilities. (63%)
2. Are the 9th & 7th Wards getting their fair share of public services? (53%)
3. Will we have the resources to support these facilities given our existing tax base? How do we pay for these recommendations? (47%)
4. How will services transition from temporary to permanent structures? What is the expected timeline? (45%)
5. "Spend money on people and services, not facilities" (38%)
6. Why are we providing services to under-populated areas? This seems at odds with the clustering concept. (20%)
7. How do we safely manage having children and adults in the same facilities? (15%)

What Happens Next?

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.

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.



Remaining Recommendations

In addition to the four recommendation areas discussed earlier at Community Congress III, the UNOP Citywide plan will include other recommendations. Participants had the opportunity to review summaries of these additional draft recommendations and provide feedback on them.

The following ideas emerged from a table discussion on the additional areas of the plan. There was only enough time to share one idea from each area of the plan.

Flood Protection

- Utilize military, international engineers & technology in the protection system

Neighborhood Stabilization

- Involve children in the planning process

Housing

- Work with CDCs and other non-profits to implement housing programs and incentives

Economic Development

- Our culture is an industry

Infrastructure and Utilities

- “The Port should be developed as a National treasure”

Transportation

- “New Orleans should be a city in which you could live easily without a car” – bicycles, light rail are alternative options

Health Care

- Focus on mental health

Education

- Address education equity – equal resources for all schools

Public Safety

- “Restore integrity at NOPD & revamp system and then move on to the recommended strategies”

Environmental Services

- Reinstate citywide recycling program

Recreation and Libraries

- More and better-maintained public open spaces that are accessible to children & the elderly

Other Municipal and Cultural Resources

- Reinforce & grow cultural heritage of New Orleans: jazz, Mardi Gras Indians, performing arts

Historic Preservation/Urban Design

- Need neighborhood specific design guidelines with technical assistance provided

Citizen Participation

The last part of the day was dedicated to a discussion on the role that citizens can play in implementing the UNOP citywide plan.

This conversation began with participants sharing some personal lessons about what it takes to stay engaged and work together in the rebuilding process. Next, participants had the opportunity to review eight options for ongoing citizen participation and provide feedback on these options. Even more importantly, participants were able to develop additional options for citizen participation that were missing from the original list. Nine new options emerged from this discussion:

- Quarterly citizen meetings and annual community congress
- Report more neighborhood success stories in the media, especially in the national media
- We need meetings specifically for young adults
- Create a scorecard of recovery progress
- Establish a TV program specifically on recovery
- Create seed funding for community development corporations
- Support independent, neighborhood-based organizations to engage citizens
- Provide more information to citizens, at home and away, through all available means – print and internet
- Create a volunteer center

Participants were asked to identify the best citizen participation options from both the original eight options and the nine new ones. The following options received the most support (listed in order of priority)*:

1. Provide more information to citizens, at home and away, through all available means – print and internet (54%)
2. Support independent, neighborhood-based organizations to engage citizens (43%)
3. Quarterly citizen meetings and annual community congress (33%)
4. Neighborhood Association Network keeps citizens involved, disseminates information & advocates on behalf of their needs (25%)
5. Citywide Recovery Council that keeps citizens informed about the recovery process & provides a mechanism for public accountability (22%)
6. Recovery Clearinghouse that provides information about the city’s recovery & the progress of implementing the unified plan (16%)

Final Feedback

At the end of the day participants voted to show their support for the UNOP plan – 91% of participants “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the unified plan should go forward.

92% of participants indicated that they had a “very high” or “high” level of commitment to remaining engaged with the effort to rebuild New Orleans.

* Sum of polling percentages may exceed 100% because participants were able to select more than one option.