NEW ORLEANS UNDER RECONSTRUCTION: a CRISIS IN PLANNING
Extreme Weather: the case of New Orleans Assessing Hurricane Katrina’s damage
August 31st, 2005
The issue of ‘Human Security”

In the 1980s, ‘human security‘ was defined as non-military threats to human welfare. In a humane world, people should live in security and dignity, free from poverty and despair, given an equal opportunity to fully develop their human potential.

Within this security box were placed serious risks to humanity that warrant priority and action by decision-makers. In particular human security watchers are studying threats of global warming and rising sea levels that might inspire violent conflicts. Furious hurricanes, deadly tornadoes, disastrous fires, torrential rains and killer mud slides are some of the risks of extreme weather caused by global warming.
In the wake of 9-11 the Patriot Act of 2001 defines critical infrastructure as “systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacity or destruction of such systems and assets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination of those matters.”

By this measure, in assessing Katrina’s national security impacts, New Orleans and nearby areas along the Gulf coast easily qualify as locations of critical infrastructure, underscored by the estimated $100 billion damage the storm created.

Flooded New Orleans August 31st 2005 --- eighty percent of New Orleans was flooded, with some parts under 15 feet (4.5 m) of water.
2004 -5 The New Orleans Times Picayune published 9 articles pointing out that federal funds supposed to go to New Orleans for Hurricane protection were diverted to the Iraq War instead. It was a disaster waiting to happen.

The Core of Engineers responsible for building channels, maintaining levees, building dikes, etc. received only 20% of its funds to protect the city from Lake Pontchartrain. In June 2004 the project manager from the Core told the Picayune the levees were sinking.
Most of the city’s levees designed and built by the United States Army Corps of Engineers broke somewhere, including the 17th Street Canal levee, the Industrial Canal levee, and the London Avenue Canal floodwall. These breaches were responsible for most of the flooding, according to a June 2007 report by the American Society of Civil Engineers.
Post-Katrina it was often heard – let the city go, its government is corrupt, its school system failing, most of its population are on welfare, etc. But most of all it was said ‘no one should live in a city below sea level’.

When levees are breached

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says it is too soon to know just how the levee walls were breached in New Orleans or even if there was any water flowing over them prior to the breach.

- Water overflows the banks and erodes a rift into a gaping hole
- Weakened section of a levee can be pushed out by the force of the water
- A levee can be a cement wall with dirt on the sides...
- ... or burlap bags, half-filled with dirt
- Saturated earth allows water to seep through walls of a levee

SOURCE: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
-SHRINKING CITY
-Before Katrina the peak population of New Orleans was 627,525 measured by the 1960 census
-By fall of 2009 New Orleans has merely half that number
-With 300,000 less people in the city, shrinkage was inevitable so planners argued.

By 2009 New Orleans is a shrinking city: with 69,727 unoccupied houses in Orleans Parish, another 15,188 abandoned in St. Bernard Parish. In other parishes there is widespread blight, crumbling infrastructure where resettlement has slowed to a trickle. Louisiana’s wetlands, the essential line of defense against a hurricane’s storm surge, have been reduced by 1,875 square miles since 1900, and are expected to lose another 673 square miles by 2050.
Assessing the Damage:
Public health care, public education and public housing are all less available and being privatized.

Crime rates remain high.

New Orleans rally against crime: January 2007
What can be done to Rebuild New Orleans? Four different plans and promises since 2005

**Plan #1. The Action Plan to Rebuild New Orleans from the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC) delivered to Mayor Nagin January 2006**

Bring Back New Orleans recommended in January 2006 that some flooded neighborhoods be replaced with parks and that the city take a go-slow attitude in rebuilding low-lying areas.
PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

The Bring New Orleans Back Commission will unveil a sweeping $17 billion plan today that calls for a vast reworking of the city’s neighborhoods and housing patterns. But in the four-month period when the fine print is hashed out over who can build where, all renovation will be halted in the flooded zone.

- Areas where rebuilding allowed now
- Building moratorium until neighborhoods prove viability
- Approximate areas of expected to become parks and greenspace
- Areas to be redeveloped, some with new housing for relocated homeowners

January 2006

Source: Bring New Orleans Back Commission

STAFF GRAPHIC
ACTION PLAN FOR NEW ORLEANS: THE NEW AMERICAN CITY, Bring Back New Orleans Plan January 11, 2006
January 2006: Hundreds of New Orleans Residents and evacuees were furious over Mayor Ray Nagin’s first recovery plan

-Nagin’s “Bring New Orleans Back Commission” proposed a four month moratorium on building permits in neighborhoods with the worst flooding from Hurricane Katrina.

-This included a federally funded forced buyout of homes in neighborhoods deemed unlivable

-“Over my dead body’ fumed Carolyn S. Parker of the hard-hit lower Ninth Ward.

-Right of Return: Many evacuees were ready to return to New Orleans and begin the recovery plan – they did not want a four month delay with so many uncertainties. What about delivery of city services, public infrastructure, utilities? Will there be schools, retail, worship and health facilities close enough to serve the neighborhoods?

- City planners called this recovery plan an attempt to created “a smaller, more manageable footprint” --- they feared allowing residents to move back into neighborhoods where they would remain isolated, without services, surrounded by blight and abandonment.

-The moratorium would save residents form re-investing in areas that would later be chartered for demolition.

-“The smaller footprint means you don’t want my mamma back! You don’t want my grandchildren back? [Babatunji Ahmed, a New Orleans craftsman]
Mayor Nagin up for re-election in May 2006 took some distance from this unpopular plan of Bring Back New Orleans:

He offered to let residents **rebuild anywhere**, but warned that homeowners in flood-prone neighborhoods would do so at their own risk.

His plan recommended: revamping schools, a new light-rail system, new riverfront development and better flood protection.

Each of the 20 or so neighborhoods of New Orleans were to establish Planning teams to investigate whether their areas were **sustainable**. These plans would be completed by **May 2006**.
# Plan #2. Neighborhood Recovery Plan (Lambert Plans):

The Neighborhood Recovery Plan funded by the City Council was presented to the mayor’s office in October 2006. It reported that all flooded neighborhoods wanted to rebuild their housing stock, restore streets and other infrastructure, reopen schools, and bring back supermarkets and pharmacies.

In addition the plan sought to enhance neighborhoods beyond where they were August 2005 and to retain the uniqueness of each specific neighborhood.

City of New Orleans, Neighborhoods Rebuilding Plan Summary (October, 2006)
TRIAGE: divide the city into three --- those areas that will recover with aid, those that will recover without aid, and those that will never recover.

The Urban Land Institute, a non-profit organization located in Cambridge Mass drew controversy when it suggested a few months after Katrina that in effect Triage should be put into practice. Concentrate the delivery of services in viable areas, and not in areas that will never recover.

Brought in to advise the Mayor’s Bring Back New Orleans Commission, the Urban Land Institute (ULI), one New Orleans activist called the ULI a “pro-profit think-tank for the real estate industry.” With the release of their report in mid-November 2005, including recommendations to leave vast, mostly poor areas of the city undeveloped, they gave their stamp of approval to a vision of New Orleans rebuilt for corporations and developers first.

By 2007 Triage System was working: the city is focused on struggling areas such as Gentilly Boulevard and Elysian Fields Avenue, and has renewed areas such as Canal Street that is returning to life but could benefit from investment. But forget rebuilding destroyed and flooded areas.

In late March 2007, $1.1 billion redevelopment money from state and local funds had been allocated for infrastructure repair and other projects with the hope of leveraging private investment to spur new business. New Orleans could no longer wait for federal money to arrive.
PLAN #3: The Unified New Orleans Plan Citywide Strategic Recovery and Rebuilding Plan: Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, and approved by the City Council and the Louisiana Recovery Authority in June 2007, this plan culminated from a five month planning process.

Architects, city planners and neighborhood residents created thirteen Planning District Recovery Plans (containing 73 officially recognized neighborhoods). Their work was coordinated with that of planners and architects focused on plans for citywide recovery and rebuilding.

City of New Orleans The Unified New Orleans Plan Citywide Strategic Recovery and Rebuilding Plan (June 2007).
The Unified New Orleans Plan
Citywide Strategic Recovery and Rebuilding Plan:

The Citywide Plan proposed a “Neighborhood Stabilization Program,” to help people in the areas hardest hit with the fewest people returning to relocate to planned “cluster developments” where there would be upgraded infrastructure, social and commercial services, and especially, neighbors.

Property owners in abandoned areas would be assisted in raising their homes, by two programs: “Elevate New Orleans” and the “Slab-on-Grade Remediation” programs. To assist those rebuilding the city, The Citywide Plan recommended developers follow the guidelines of the New Orleans Pattern Book developed by New Urbanism advocates.
Plan #4: 2007 Redevelopment Plan [The Blakely Plan March 2007]: The 4th recovery plan focused on 17 ‘hub sites’ around the city to act as magnets for private development by leveraging public money into them.

15 of those sites were not hit by flood waters of Katrina or had begun to rebuild 2 devastated areas received funds: sites in the Lower Ninth Ward and a section surrounding Lake Forest Plaza shopping center.
The 17 Target areas are consistent with the development approaches citizens suggested in earlier redevelopment plans, such as the Unified New Orleans Plan, the Lambert Plan and the Bring New Orleans Back Commission plan.

The city will provide loans and other incentives to developers interested in investing in key locations within the zones. The zones are generally high visibility sites, with sufficient land and other assets. They also have a high potential to attract investors and possess adequate resources to catalyze development such as schools and libraries.

The zones take three formats: [A refurbished ideas of TRIAGE]

Rebuild areas have experienced severe destruction of physical structures and social networks. These areas will require major rebuilding, or significant public and private investment in order to recover.

Redevelop areas are places where some recovery components and resources are already present. They have a high potential for attracting investment and acting as a catalyst for further redevelopment and recovery of the affected community.

Renew areas include specific projects that require relatively modest public intervention in order to supplement work already underway by the private and nonprofit sector.
"We're not sitting around waiting for anybody any longer," Nagin said in a news conference. "We're going to move this city forward with the resources that we can generate creatively, and everybody who wants to join us later, you're welcome to come on board."

A common historical thread is that the designated 17 areas are “all centered on the old markets, on which the city was built in the first place.” Each development zone is approximately one-half mile in diameter, although the area can vary slightly.

“Plans are Powerful.”

“Plans give people hope. After all that devastation, there’s still hope,” said Blakely.
The hope was that if **these 17 limited areas** are redeveloped, they will become **catalysts** for further development around them. Under the plan, some of the public investment will be used as loans and unspecified “other incentives” to **private developers**, and some will be used for the development of **public works like libraries and clinics**.
One year after the 2007 Recovery Plan: no cranes, no Parisian boulevards, little in the way of real redevelopment. The basketball court has been repaved, but the houses remain in derelict condition in image below.

A sea of blight and abandonment still defines much of the city. “Weary and bewildered residents, [from the on again off again recovery plans] forced to bring back the hard-hit city on their own, have searched the plan’s 17 'target recovery zones' for any sign that the city’s promises should not be consigned to the municipal filing cabinet, along with their predecessors. On their one-year anniversary, the designated 'zones' have hardly budged.“ NYT April 1, 2008.

The plans have been grandiose, promises are made and not kept, the plans fall into oblivion.
Bill Quigley: There are no precise figures on the racial breakdown of poor and working people who are still displaced, indications strongly suggest they are overwhelmingly African-American. The black population of New Orleans has plummeted by 69 percent, while white population fell 39 percent, according to Center for Constitutional Rights July 2009. Areas that are fully recovering are more affluent and predominately white. New Orleans, which was 67 percent black before Katrina, is estimated to be no higher than 58.8 percent black now.
NON-PLAN: Public housing projects were demolished December 2007 before a replacement plan had been set, even though public housing in New Orleans ranked among the nation’s best. City planners wanted a ‘fresh start’ for the city. Scattered across the city, there were 4,500 units to be demolished by the summer of 2008.

Built as part of the New Deal’s progressive social agenda often these apartment complexes fuse into the city’s street grid and the fabric of surrounding neighborhoods, the quality of construction materials, their concrete structural frames, red-brick facades are unimaginable in public housing today.
In the most blatant sign of government action to reduce the numbers of poor people in New Orleans, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is demolishing thousands of intact public housing apartments. HUD is spending nearly $1 billion with questionable developers to end up with much less affordable housing.

Right after Katrina, HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson predicted New Orleans was "not going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again." He then worked to make that prediction true.

Since hurricane Katrina a new architectural style has emerged in New Orleans that can only be described as **Defensive (houses on pillars)**, **Defiant (pristine homes surrounded by devastation)**, and **Do Good (affordable housing built by non-profits)**

![DEFENSIVE HOUSING](image)
This is My Home
The fight for public housing in New Orleans
PLAN #5: Carrying out the policy of Triage, Nagin promotes a "Reinventing the Crescent" riverfront plan, into which his administration wants to pour as much as $300 million. Although most of that money would go into building parks and other amenities, the plans also call for building residential towers that could attract wealthier people to shore up the city's tax base. Politicians representing hard-hit areas protest that struggling areas need the help more, among them City Councilwoman Cynthia Willard-Lewis,
Reclaiming the Mississippi River: from docks and wharves that are roadblocks to the creation of a riverside promenade

January 2008, the Riverfront Plan got a green light. Delayed by Katrina, the plan was first proposed in 2004. The first phase of redevelopment, a 4.5 mile plan unveiled January 2009 will encompasses $163 million of improvements

The first phase will transform a gritty industrial zone marred by burned-out cargo docks, the area is set to become verdant green space replete with bike paths, pavilions, two piers and even electricity-generating windmills. If everything goes according to plan, the park will open in 2011.

Controversy:
Why should there be high-rises on the waterfront?

What about neighborhood revitalization?

Why are those who own waterfront property leading the riverfront plan?
Deploying a 50 year old mandate for a MASTER PLAN: PLAN #6

June 2008 contract called for a master plan with the following elements:


The Master Plan – the first for the city – would be law requiring all land use decisions, zoning codes, would have to be in conformity with the PLAN.
The 2009 Draft Plan: Goody Clancy & Associates Boston Massachusetts
- fails to guide the future physical development of the city
- fails to set priorities and fails to deal with many challenges the city faces
- fails to address the perception that the city is not a safe place to invest in due to catastrophic flood risk
- fails to offer chapters on citizen participation or implementation policies [BGP October 2009]

Planning for Housing and Historic Preservation will be ceded to a new group or a future plan. Key decisions will be made later by yet-to-be-formed committees.

Land-use, urban design, neighborhood and economic development are overlooked by the plan, or glossed over.

It calls for approximately **20 new groups and 20 new plans or studies** such as ‘heritage tourism task force’, ‘cultural commission’, ‘pedestrian and bicycle advisory commission’.
Urban Design: has been part of all discussions of how to rebuild the city but the draft plan does not consider this as an issue to be included in its discussions.

The draft plan does include plans for improving the police department’s web site; recruiting multi-lingual fire fighters; better training for 311 operators; or a ban on plastic shopping bags. But nowhere does the draft plan provide a guide for the physical development of the city.

The City Planning Commission had been hoping to vote on the plan at its Nov. 10 meeting and send it to the City Council, which then would have 90 days to act on it.

David Dixon, chief planner of the Draft Master Plan: "This will be the longest master plan in the country because the last 20 years of work aren't there"
Right of Return: for New Orleans Diaspora
Obstructions to the Right of Return:

St. Bernard Parish, a 93 percent white suburb adjoining New Orleans, enacted a post-Katrina ordinance which restricted home owners from renting out single-family homes "unless the renter is a blood relative" without securing a permit from the government.
Jefferson Parish, another adjoining majority-white suburb, unanimously passed a resolution opposing all low-income tax credit multi-family housing in the areas closest to New Orleans effectively stopping the construction of a 200 unit apartment building on vacant land for people over the age of 62 and any further assisted housing.
Across Lake Ponchartrain from New Orleans, the chief law enforcement officer of St. Tammany Parish, Sheriff Jack Strain, complained openly about the post-Katrina presence of "thugs and trash" from "New Orleans public housing" and announced that people with dreadlocks or "chee wee hairstyles" could "expect to be getting a visit from a sheriff's deputy."