

RECORD OF DISCUSSION

Home Building Plan for Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier

Date: Thursday, September 7, 2006

Participants (listed alphabetically by affiliation, where provided):

Jay Arena	
Alisa Bright	
Russell M. Fraise	
David Uhl	
Elizabeth Cook	C3/Hands Off Iberville
Geraldine Cox	FEMA
Daniel Samuels	Faubourg St. John, Friends of Lafitte Corridor
Fr. Walter Baer	Grace Episcopal
Sr. Beth Driscoll	Lantern Light
Sr. Marie Roche	Lantern Light
Sr. Joan White	Lantern Light
Paul Ikemire	PNOLA
Nathan Rothstein	PNOLA
Sr. Vera Butler	Tulane-Canal CDC
Beth Bergman	Tulane/Gravier Council
Michelle Levine	Tulane/Gravier
Clay Thomas	Tulane/Gravier
Cassandra Thompson	Tulane/Gravier

Home Building Plan Outreach Team

Jim Kelly	Providence
Nicole Swerhun	Public Process Facilitator
Amy Brown	Ujamaa
Ray Gindroz	Urban Design Associates

This Meeting Record was written by Nicole Swerhun, a member of the Home Building Plan team. Her job is to help facilitate two-way communication between the Home Building Plan team and the residents of Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier. This Meeting Record was written to reflect the key messages shared by participants at the meeting, and is not intended to serve as a verbatim transcript. It was circulated in draft for review by all participants at the meeting. No comments were received.

The **purpose** of the discussion was to:

- Introduce the Home Building Plan for Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier, including the rationale for the plan, it's purpose, and the team leading the work
- Answer questions and receive ideas and suggestions regarding the Plan, including key issues to address through the process
- Describe the public workshops that will be held in early October (Oct 3rd and 7th) as a critical part of the development of the Home Building Plan, and to encourage participation in those workshops

Key messages from the meeting:

1. **From Jim Kelly, CEO, Providence Community Housing**

- **About Jim and Providence.** Jim is the CEO of Catholic Charities. Providence, a Catholic, post-Katrina housing initiative, was formed when a number of local church and community based organizations came together to see how they could help address the critical need for affordable and supportive housing in southern Louisiana.
- **Providence's Goal.** Over the next 5 years, it is Providence's goal to restore, rebuild and/or develop 7000 units of housing. Providence's neighbourhood-based sponsors include Christopher Homes, Catholic Charities, St. Peter Claver/Ujamaa, St. Joseph's/Tulane-Canal CDC, and Reconcile New Orleans. Representatives of the Vietnamese and Hispanic communities are also linked to this initiative.
- **The Home Building Plan.** The first major initiative is being led by Providence, in partnership with an organization called Enterprise, is a Home Building Plan that will create 1500 housing units in the neighborhoods of Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier (*see Press Release, newsletter, and feedback form attached*). As part of this Plan, all 900 subsidized units from Lafitte will be replaced.
- **Commitments.** As part of the Home Building Plan, Providence and Enterprise are committed to ensuring: (1) every resident has the opportunity to come home, (2) there is no decrease in the number of subsidized units, (3) residents are involved in either the repair and/or rebuild, (4) a comprehensive service package is available to assist residents coming home.
- **Local outreach is critical.** Outreach to Lafitte residents will be led by an organization called ACT (All Congregations Together). We will also be working with representatives of the Lafitte Residents Council, as well as St. Joseph's and the Tulane-Canal CDC to reach the Tulane/Gravier community. Our goal is to enable all people to come back.
- **The importance of community services.** Lafitte sits in the middle of two planning districts – Providence and Enterprise are looking at what can be done to make these neighbourhoods stronger. Their approach involves looking first at how to develop housing, and then connecting with others to collaborate around other community services.

2. From Ray Gindroz, Urban Design Associates

- **Bit of background on UDA.** Over the years UDA has worked in a number of urban neighborhoods, including Hope 6 projects, new start projects, and the integration of public housing into other kinds of developments. The company started in 1964 when the Ford Foundation asked UDA to help locate new schools in a way that would help bring together segregated communities. A critical part of their work on that project involved talking to residents about how the design and location of the schools would impact the quality of life of residents. Since that project, talking to residents has remained a critical part of the UDA approach.
- **Questions that UDA asks.** When working on initiatives like the Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier Home Building Plan, UDA talks to residents about things like: What it is about an area residents like best? What are the strengths in the area on which to build a new plan? What don't residents like in the area? From that, UDA learns what needs to be fixed or repaired in a neighborhood. UDA also asks people what their dreams are. All of this is often done through a mapping exercise using dots – with green dots indicating things people like in their community, red dots indicating things people don't like, and blue dots on areas where it's the most important to make a change.
- **UDA's three step process.** When UDA works in a community, they follow a three step process. They will be following this process for the Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier Home Building Plan. The first step involves "Figuring out what's going on". Step 2 is "Trying out some ideas", and Step 3 is "Figuring out what to do". The residents have an important role at each step.
- **Louisiana Speaks Pattern Book.** UDA led the development of the Louisiana Speaks Pattern Book which is effort to provide direction to the design of buildings throughout the state. Copies are available free of charge in different locations in New Orleans.
- **Timing and Opportunities to Participate.** This project is working under a very tight timeline. For the 1500 units to be funded, a tax credit application needs to be submitted by October 20, 2006. The project was initiated on August 21st. In order to get as much information as possible in this short timeframe, UDA is working with Providence, Enterprise, and a number of other organizations. During the week of October 3rd a "kick off" public workshop will be held, along with a series of working sessions. The week will end with a "wrap up" public workshop on Saturday, October 7th. We hope you'll be able to join us. The first Newsletter for the Home Building Plan will be sent to you along with the Draft Meeting Record of this meeting.

3. From Meeting Participants

Note: Responses from the Home Building Team, where provided, are written in *italics*.

Questions and comments on the Home Building Plan

- **Should Lafitte be demolished?** What is your opinion on whether Lafitte should stay up or come down? I think you should stop your work and join those opposed to the demolition of Lafitte. *HUD and HANO have one opinion about the future of Lafitte, others have other opinions – our team is going to focus on the residents of Lafitte. This is not only about new houses, it's about setting in motion a series of initiatives to bring positive change to the broad community. This is one of the key decision points that communities need to make. The decision is – do you become the agent to redevelop Lafitte in hope that it's a way to help the community? Or do you stand aside and block the decision? It is our view that moving forward with this Plan opens up opportunities for a significant amount of investment in an area that historically hasn't had much investment. Our team has decided to work with the decision and strive to deliver the most just outcome possible.*
- **We disagree strongly with the Home Building Plan.** The United Front for Affordable Housing believes people have the right to return. We're concerned that you have a stake in HUD privatizing Lafitte. We disagree whole heartedly with what you're doing. We need to revitalize the economy, need jobs and decent wages.
- **There is no need to deconcentrate housing.** We worry about your argument that Lafitte is too compact. The concentration of housing in Western Europe is much higher. *Many years ago there was a legal case made in Chicago for deconcentrating poverty. The Brookings Institution and organizations like Fannie Mae have also commissioned a number of studies that look at things like the changes in education level when communities have been through this type of process. UDA has been involved in a retrofit of an existing public housing project and it led to dramatic social change. Unfortunately as of the year 2000, much of this information is no longer tracked.*
- **Don't bring Lafitte back the way it was.** The unilateral decision to wipe out all of Lafitte is an awful public policy decision, but now that it's been decided, it's important that we don't bring it back the way it was. The original design was a mistake, perhaps well intended, but still it would be detrimental to bring it back the way it was. We need a mix of tenants, higher quality units, and we need to welcome every tenant who wants to come back.
- **How much home ownership is required before a community starts to change?** We had about 20% home ownership before storm, and we want to increase that number. Is there a particular percentage of home ownership that is required in order for things to start to change? *There is no clear single answer. Generally 50% is what people talk about as being a good number. That being said, some communities that have 75% home ownership are a lot less well off then those with 40% home ownership. There are a couple of key steps to increasing home ownership: (1) People need to have some sense of security that if they are going to invest their life savings, is it a safe place to invest, and they need to know that others will join them? (2) People need to see cues that things are changing. One way to do this is by*

working to create some sense of wholeness about some places in the community. In the Tulane/Gravier area it's hard because the sites to be redeveloped through the Home Building Plan are so scattered. From our experience, if you can find a way to get 40% to 50% of houses to improve in a block (e.g. either through repair by the existing homeowners or some other mechanism) then the overall percentage in the community doesn't matter because a "bandwagon" has been created. People need to be able to stand at their house, look in each direction, and see people keeping their houses up. I urge you to think positively about rental because it is lower risk. Ownership is hard because it is slower – it happens one-by-one.

- **Timing.** You said your target date for the 1500 homes is 5 years. What happens in the interim? No way this housing can get built before New Orleans gets hit by a second Katrina. You can't expect the original residents to wait that long. I have a sister in Michigan, other relatives in Florida – how long can tenants wait? Why not work incrementally (e.g. work from Galvez to Rocheblave, then let people in the next section over come home). *We are seeing what we can do in the meantime. St. Martin Manor on North Johnson has 150 units potentially available, and we also have 200 adjudicated properties in this area that we are waiting to formally acquire (from people who haven't paid taxes in 5 years). We are also approaching the church for possible properties to develop housing. We are also talking to others regarding providing services like health clinics, etc.*
- **Residents Council do not represent all the voices in Lafitte.** Council members alone can't be considered the voice of Lafitte. There are a number of Lafitte residents that live in New Orleans and they need to be involved. *We will be reaching out to all Lafitte Residents. In terms of our work with the Resident Council, representatives have told us that there's a problem with residents accessing their homes in Lafitte, and we're trying to respond to that concern.*
- **When we evacuated the Lafitte, it wasn't the Lafitte.** The Parliament of New Orleans over 10 years allowed Lafitte to deteriorate. The population changed, there were more kids. We used to have individual back yards, decent parking, good landscaping, a continuous fence. Before the storm crime was up, the landscaping was gone, the bushes were torn down, there were old cars crowding the parking, and people could steal a purse at one end and run clear through to the other side.
- **Rent or own?** Will the new 1500 units be ownership or rental? *There will be at least 600 ownership units and no more than 900 renters.*
- **Geographic focus.** Is your geographic focus Lafitte? *The area for the Home Building Plan goes from Tulane to Esplanade, Broad to Claiborne, and also includes Old Treme.*
- **Right of return.** Do you support the "absolute right of return"? *"Right of return" is a legal term. We are offering an absolute opportunity to return, and we will work with the residents to come up with a system that works for them. It won't be HUD's decision who gets to come home.*

- **There is a huge housing need.** There were 10,000 people on the HANO list before the storm. So even if residents do not come home, we still need the affordable housing.
- **Land ownership.** Will HANO still own the property after Home Building Plan is complete? *Those legalities have not yet been worked out.*
- **Financing.** Can you guarantee that you'll get the financing to do the Home Building Plan? *No, we can't guarantee anything at this point.*

Suggestions

- **Need independent assessment of the viability of the existing housing stock.** It would help the credibility of your project if an independent assessment of the viability of the existing housing stock was conducted. Then – then match the results up with a survey of residents who want to come home now
- **Can you provide best practices?** Since Katrina, everyone has been talking about best practices. Can Enterprise provide information on best practices on redeveloping neighbourhoods? It would be good to know the life stories of residents who have been displaced and then moved back. *This is something we can look into providing. In the past we've worked on a series of very successful developments, and the residents came back. The most important this is the way in which supportive services work and the impact on the larger community.*

4. **Wrap-Up**

The Home Building Team thanked people for coming to the meeting, and encouraged them to participate in the October workshops. Participants were also encouraged to write their names on the meeting sign-in sheet so that the Draft Meeting Record could be sent out for their review.

Attachments to the Email circulated with the Draft Meeting Record

- A. Press Release from August 21, 2006 Announcing HUD Decision to allow Providence and Enterprise to Redevelop Lafitte
- B. Newsletter introducing the Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier Home Building Plan
- C. Feedback Form that accompanies the Newsletter