



A Peoples' Plan for Overcoming the Hurricane Katrina Blues

a comprehensive strategy for
building a more vibrant, sustainable,
and equitable 9th Ward



prepared by:
the **ACORN** Housing/University Partnership

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Cornell University



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK



University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Peoples' Plan is a strategic action plan for the recovery of the 9th Ward. We've created it based on conversations with residents – some struggling to return home, others intent on remaining in a neighborhood that has always been there own. The Peoples' Plan provides a thorough assessment of what must be done to provide recovery in one of the hardest hit areas of the City, and provides a recovery model for all badly flooded areas.

Our Plan seeks to transform the 9th Ward as it is rebuilt. The proposed transformation will be resident-driven and will provide improved employment opportunities, better education programs as well as greater access to healthcare, childcare and numerous other community services.

We offer this draft of the Peoples' Plan to the City so its ideas can be incorporated into the unified city plan (UNOP). We present the Plan on behalf of more than six hundred 9th Ward residents who contributed to the creation of this document by participating in personal interviews and attending community meetings – all during a time of great personal loss and sorrow.

We hope this plan contributes to the cure.

Special Qualities of the Peoples' Plan

The Peoples' Plan, in the context of Post-Katrina recovery planning, is unique in the following ways:

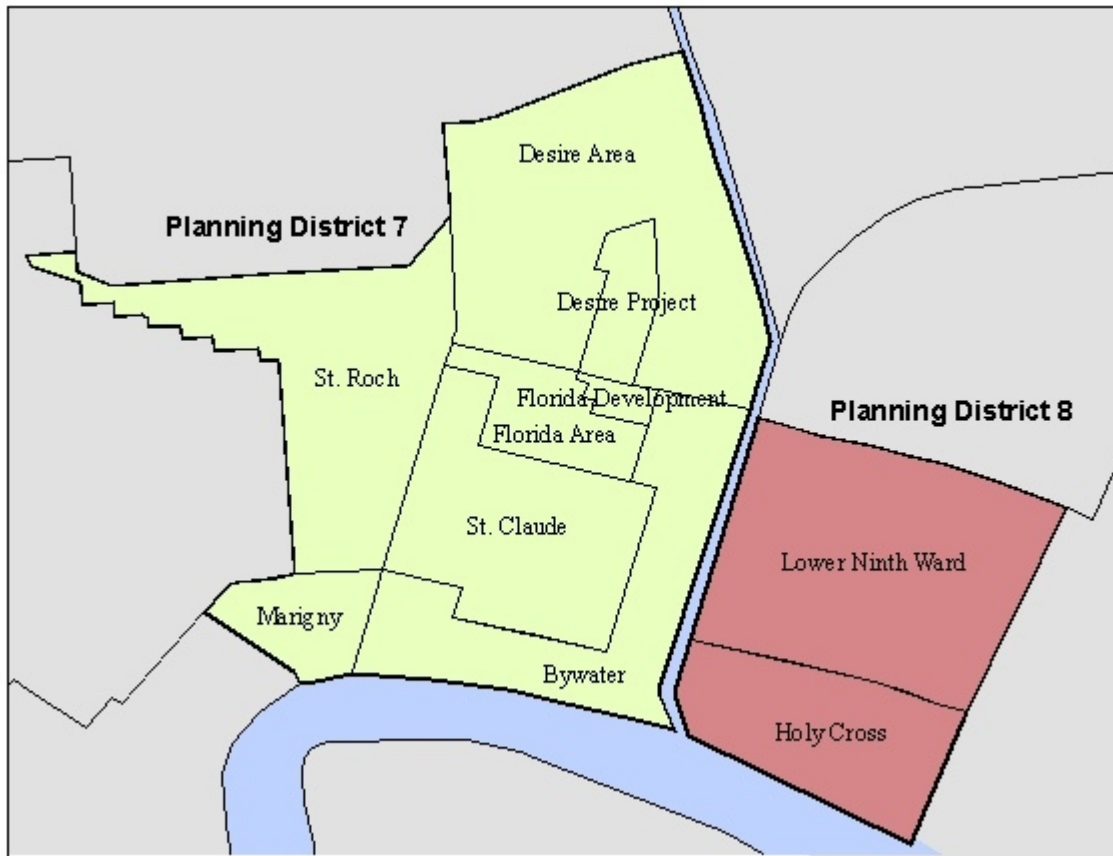
- The Peoples' Plan was developed at the request of Louisiana ACORN – the state's largest community organization – which has been a part of New Orleans for more than 30 years. More than 9,000 New Orleans families – now spread throughout the country – are members of ACORN. ACORN members are predominately low- to moderate-income, and ACORN's mission is to make their voices heard.
- The Plan comes out of a unique partnership involving ACORN, ACORN Housing, and three of the nation's leading research universities – Cornell University, Columbia University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- ACORN began exploring recovery options just after the storm, starting in November 2005 when ACORN held a community forum to discuss rebuilding needs with city planners and policymakers from New Orleans and beyond. For nearly sixteen months, ACORN has elicited resident feedback during ongoing community meetings. In addition, the ACORN Housing/University Partnership recently completed a block-by-block survey of 9th Ward residents, which yielded important information for writing this plan.

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- The Partnership analyzed in detail the conditions in the 9th Ward following Hurricane Katrina. The Peoples' Plan wasn't written until we completed a physical inspection of nearly 3,000 building parcels and structures.
- The ACORN Housing/University Partnership will continue its work with local organizations. Together we will translate the proposals contained within this plan into reality.

Neighborhoods in the 9th Ward

Throughout the Peoples' Plan, the 9th Ward refers to the 7th and 8th Planning Districts. This map delineates the 7th and 8th Districts and their neighborhoods.



A Few Undeniable Facts

Population

- Although approximately 50 percent of the City's population has been able to return home, only 20 percent of 9th Ward residents have come back.

Housing Prior to Katrina

- Prior to Hurricane Katrina, 17 percent of housing units in the 7th District and 14 percent of units in the 8th District were vacant. (See map on page 2 for district boundaries.)
- 59 percent of Lower 9th Ward residents owned their home, compared to 47 percent across the City.

Post-Katrina Housing Conditions

- The majority of the housing units in the 9th ward are bungalows, constructed of hardwoods and raised above ground level by piers, which are between 1 to 2 feet high. These units experienced varying amounts of damage but are repairable, in a cost-effective manner.
- Throughout the 9th Ward, more than eight in ten houses standing as of October 2006 could be repaired for approximately half the cost of replacing the structures.
- Throughout the 9th Ward, most neighborhoods have limited vacant lots and heavily damaged buildings. These areas are suitable for infill development.
- Homeowners have gutted 30 percent of the houses in the 9th Ward. Owners have repaired or are in the process of repairing another 30 percent of housing in these areas.

Rehabilitation Costs

- The highest percentage of homes with heavy flooding are in the lake-side of the Lower 9th Ward, near Florida Avenue, and in the river-side of Desire (see map). Homes in these areas will require full gutting. Initial estimates of repair costs are approximately \$60,000. Elevating these homes to new FEMA height guidelines will add an additional \$15,000-\$25,000 to the costs of renovation.

The Long Road Home

- In October 2006, 25 percent of 7th District residents were living in their homes or in nearby trailers. In the 8th District, 7 percent of residents were living in their homes or nearby trailers – on the river-side of Claiborne, 13 percent. More residents have returned since then, but the lack of housing assistance has prevented large-scale return.

Resident Opinions

Elicited through public meetings and block-by-block interviews, the following sentiments and actions helped guide the Peoples' Plan:

- The overwhelming majority of 9th Ward residents voiced a strong commitment to their community. Many view their neighborhoods as sacred ground they will not, under any circumstances, leave.
- A significant number of the residents felt tremendous hope and optimism regarding the future of their neighborhoods, which they expect to recover.
- In the absence of insurance proceeds, FEMA assistance, and Road Home checks, many residents are self-financing the rehabilitation of their homes. Residents are liquidating their 401k plans and/or receiving assistance from family members or religious congregations.
- Many residents expressed a strong desire for technical assistance regarding rehabilitation strategies, construction techniques, building materials and/or contracting.
- Most of those involved with home repairs were finding it extremely difficult to locate what they considered to be experienced, reliable and fair-dealing contractors.
- Several homeowners engaged in the rehabilitation process expressed a fear that they would run out of money and/or energy before completing work on their homes. They feared being forced to sell their family homes to outside speculators.
- Residents expressed concern over crime, schools and health care services. Residents feel strongly that recovery plans must go beyond housing to address these issues.

Resident Proposals

Over the last fifteen months, residents suggested numerous rebuilding proposals. The following proposals recurred most often and provided a foundation for the Peoples' Plan.

- Clear the way for residents to return by providing homeowners with Road Home money, cleaning-up debris and repairing infrastructure damage
- Work with homeowners to provide technical assistance on housing rehabilitation; monitor housing speculation and predatory lending
- Re-open neighborhood schools and create after-school study centers and programs for at-risk kids

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- Provide employment opportunities, for example by bringing in a modular housing facility; at the same time, prohibit industrial activity near residential areas
- Set up work programs that prepare residents for employment in the construction industry and provide teens with apprenticeships in the building trades
- Subsidize day care so parents can work and complete housing improvements
- Increase police foot patrols and explore a community policing pilot program
- Open community health centers

Overall Development Objectives

The Peoples' Plan has turned residents' proposals into a plan for community action. The Plan attached to this executive summary describes each recommendation in more detail and also includes steps necessary to accomplish each recommendation, cost estimates and agencies that could assist.

Improving the Environment

Immediate Needs

- A comprehensive clean-up of the 9th Ward
- Complete infrastructure repairs

Housing

Immediate Needs

- Place trailers on city-owned property for temporary housing
- Provide bridge loans to Road Home applicants
- Preserve and improve public housing to provide affordable housing opportunities to low-income families
- Work with the State to maintain affordable insurance coverage on vacant homes
- Establish a community assistance center to guide homeowners as they rebuild

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Further Needs

- Work with non-profit housing organizations to acquire and rehabilitate vacant structures
- Initiate a rent stabilization program to make rental prices affordable to the working class
- Create a community land trust to minimize the threat of speculation while maximizing community control over land for future residential housing
- Develop a housing trust fund to stimulate the production of units affordable to workers returning to New Orleans

Economic Development

Immediate Needs

- Construct a modular housing factory (away from residential neighborhoods) to meet local housing and employment needs

Further Needs

- Pursue a YouthBuild grant to fund an alternative education and workforce development program and train high school dropouts and unemployed young adults in the building trades
- Create economic opportunities by encouraging investment along the Ward's major arteries: St. Claude Avenue, Claiborne Avenue and Galvez Street
- Reopen St. Roch's Market as a food and grocery center

Education

Immediate Needs

- Reopen elementary schools in the neighborhoods to reduce children's travel times
- Open a vocational-technical school to train youth and adults for jobs in sectors of the regional economy likely to expand, such as construction

Further Needs

- Integrate education, social services and recreation into neighborhood community centers

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Municipal Services

Immediate Needs

- Establish an effective emergency evacuation plan
- Initiate a community policing program on a pilot basis
- Establish a network of high quality day care facilities

Further Needs

- Expand drug treatment services for local residents

Culture

Further Needs

- Transform the former Navy facility, near the Industrial Canal, into a visual and performing arts exhibition celebrating New Orleans' African American culture

The steps to implement these objectives are specified in the full report, as are examples of how the proposed redevelopment strategies have worked elsewhere in America.

For More Information

A draft of the Peoples' Plan may be found at www.rebuildingtheninth.org or by contacting:

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