CONTRIBUTORS

IÑAKI ÁBALOS
STAN ALLEN
MANUEL CASTELLS
CATHERINE DUMONT D’AYOT
OLAFUR ELIASSON
PATRICK GARTMANN
TONI GIRONÉS
CHRISTOPHE GIROT
ALICE HUCKER
CHRISTIAN KEREZ
MAI KOMURO
MICHAL KRZYWDZIAK
JONATHAN LIN
JOSEP LLUÍS MATEO
MARCEL MEILI
PAULO MENDES DA ROCHA
RENZO PIANO
FLORIAN SAUTER
FREDERIC SCHWARTZ
RAMIAS STEINEMANN
PETER ST. JOHN
PHILIP URSPRUNG
MARIA VIÑÉ
ERWIN VIRAY

Edited by the Chair Prof. Dr. Josep Lluis Mateo
NEW ORLEANS NOW—
DESIGN AND PLANNING
AFTER THE STORM

by Frederic Schwartz

Hurricane Katrina, 2005.
On August 29th 2005, a monstrous hurricane of biblical proportions fueled by the climatic warming of the Gulf of Mexico, set its eye on New Orleans, exposing America’s neglect of its aging infrastructure, disappearing coastal wetlands, deteriorating public housing and its failure to protect its people – especially its poor. Like New York City’s post-9/11 political mess, nature’s wake-up call in New Orleans has been mired in missed opportunities, false promises, ego, greed, corruption and lack of leadership.

The planning of our cities in the face of disaster (natural and political) must reach beyond the band-aid of short-term recovery. Disaster offers a unique opportunity to rethink the planning and politics of our metro-regional areas – it is a chance to redefine our cities and to reassert values of environmental care and social justice, of community building and especially of helping the poor with programs for quality, affordable, sustainable housing.

PUBLIC HOUSING CRISIS
Two years after Hurricane Katrina, one of the most pressing and long-term issues in New Orleans is how to re-direct failed public housing policies (both federal and local) to best serve the needs of its citizens. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) think they have a game plan.

Their idea is to sell prime inner-city tracts of public housing land cleared of all buildings and give substantial tax incentives to private-sector developers in an effort to jump start mixed-income projects and bring greatly needed new housing, health and community services to these sites. These are laudable goals, but while affordable public housing is desperately needed in New Orleans, the faulty and largely unknown equation of HUD/HANO’s 2006 Request for Development Proposals for these housing areas required a staggering 2/3 reduction in density – 1/3 the number of total housing units then divided into three sectors: 1/3 market-rate, 1/3 affordable and 1/3 assisted. The HUD/HANO equation (1/3 x 1/3) results in 90% less public housing units! For example, St. Bernard, one of the largest public housing areas in the New Orleans at 45 units per acre, would be reduced to just 15 per acre. Under the government’s plan, St. Bernard’s 1,800 total units are further reduced to 200 public (assisted) units, 200 affordable units and 200 market-rate units. The government’s reasoning is that current housing densities breed crime and poverty. False! New York City, for example, America’s densest city also has America’s lowest crime rate. As a comparison, we are currently building Harlem’s largest new mixed-income housing project (50,000 m²) at a density of over 100 units per acre.

Those who question the government’s plans also vehemently protest the destruction of the city’s public housing stock that is worthy of revitalization, because of its architectural, cultural and historic significance and the limited
investment required to upgrade. Two years after Katrina and after much debate, the immediate imperative is to rehabilitate and re-open these still shuttered buildings to afford all former residents of public housing in New Orleans the opportunity to return to their own homes.

**UNIFIED NEW ORLEANS PLAN (UNOP)**
Following our successful post-9/11 planning in Lower Manhattan and after witnessing the failure of levees and government, our office redirected its energy to New Orleans in an effort to renew this vibrant historic city that suffers from the nation’s highest crime rate, unemployment, a failing school system, widespread corruption, racism, as well as the lack of decent rental, public and affordable housing. The citizens of New Orleans recognized our commitment, experience and willingness to help by selecting us in a unique process, where they controlled the final vote in the selection of neighborhood and district planners.

Initial planning efforts in New Orleans repeatedly stalled while people suffered every day through a number of false starts. In August 2006, we were selected as one of four lead planning consultants for the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP). Our work included the largest and most diversely populated area in the City (poor to rich, low ground to high, dry to flooded) – Planning District 3 and District 4 (including 21 historic neighborhoods and 43% of New Orleans’ post-Katrina population). The work was completed under the auspices of the New Orleans City Planning Commission and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF) and the Bush/Clinton Fund.

For five months we worked closely with individual residents, neighborhood associations and public agencies, holding over 100 community meetings to plan and submit for citizen approval 50 “bricks and mortar,” action-oriented planning proposals for funding by the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) and other state and federal programs. In addition to addressing immediate issues such as infrastructure, housing, open space, sustainability, transportation and safety, we prepared short- and long term planning for both districts and their numerous fine-grain neighborhoods, as well as city-wide initiatives.

**INNOVATIVE DESIGN AND PLANNING TO ADDRESS THE HOUSING CRISIS**
As the lead planner for District 4, which includes the largest concentration of public housing in the city (Iberville, St. Bernard, Lafitte and B.W. Cooper), we have made every effort to involve the residents and community in the planning effort as a vocal advocate of mixed-income housing that is re-integrated into the neighborhoods through the re-establishment of the historic street grid and strategic architectural and urban interventions.

Our design and planning team started from the premise that every single resident be afforded the opportunity to return to their own neighborhood and that
every effort is made to preserve the unique architectural heritage of New Orleans, including public housing buildings of merit. We have been outspoken advocates of affordable, sustainable, quality housing in well-planned mixed-use communities that include retail, community facilities and open space. While density has been a battle cry of those recommending wholesale demolition of the city’s public housing areas, density in fact is not the issue – good planning, long-term care, management and maintenance for sustainable community building are.

The return to New Orleans has leveled off at its current population level of 225,000 from 455,000 pre-Katrina and its 1962 high of 627,525, particularly for the lack of housing and vision. As of July 2007, 77,000 potential renters have no homes or units to rent. Of our 50 architectural, urban design and planning initiatives developed for the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP), three proposals (one for private homeowners, one for affordable housing and another for public housing) are illustrated to suggest a few innovative ideas to alleviate the city’s housing crisis.

3R PUBLIC HOUSING INITIATIVE FOR DISTRICT 4:
RENEWAL, RESTORATION AND REDEVELOPMENT

Our public housing initiative for over 4,000 units is an integral part of the District 4 Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) that was adopted in May 2007 by the New Orleans City Planning Commission. All four housing project sites, built in the 1940s and 50s, include sensibly planned 2, 3 and 4-storey sturdy red brick buildings with red terra cotta tile roofs shaded by majestic oak trees. The buildings and sites have fallen into disrepair primarily through government neglect and mismanagement, as well as the lack of police, parking, shopping, schools and other community amenities. The pre-Katrina population of these four sites was 99% African-American. This initiative addresses a basic tenet of the Unified New Orleans Plan that promises every resident of New Orleans the right to return home, including all residents of public housing. The goal is to provide a viable mix of affordable, sustainable, quality housing opportunities for renters, workers, public-assisted families and homeowners.

The 3R Affordable and Public Housing Program renews, restores and redevelops all of the major public housing sites in District 4 (Lafitte, B. W. Cooper, St. Bernard, Iberville) by establishing mixed-income neighborhoods. The urban design strategy erases the demarcation of the super block and its association with poverty by re-establishing the street grid and seamlessly re-integrating the surrounding neighborhood by blurring the boundaries between public housing and blocks of historic shotgun and other privately owned or rented homes.

Phased renovation of the majority of significant housing buildings, selective demolition and the strategic addition of new structures, both within the site boundaries and in the surrounding neighborhood, will occur over a three year period.
Existing units will be combined to make larger units, decreasing the total unit density without changing the important total room or population count. New infill housing will be located both within the site and in the adjacent neighborhoods on blighted and vacant properties.

The design of new housing will reflect the look and feel of the surrounding neighborhoods with a mix of both modern interpretations of historic typologies and new urbanist models. It will be built to the highest standards of sustainability and safety, from hurricane winds to flooding. The project will utilize federal public infrastructure funding to offset development costs for the new street grid, sidewalks, landscaping and utilities.

While the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has declared its intention to rehabilitate and rebuild public housing in New Orleans, our proposal ensures significantly higher density than current HUD HOPE 6 requirements, providing housing to accommodate all displaced former tenants in their own neighborhoods. Higher densities will establish a critical mass to support and retail, public transportation, social services, education and community programs. We call it NEW HOPE.

NEIGHBORHOOD GREEN BLOCK AND HOUSE MOVING PROGRAM

The Neighborhood Green Block and House Moving Program is a city-wide initiative that addresses the lack of neighborhood public open space, the dire need to renew blighted properties and the problems that neighborhoods and homeowners face resulting from the "jack-o-lantern" or "missing teeth" effect caused by scattered run-down, abandoned houses. Using District 4 neighborhoods as an example, this program was developed with and overwhelmingly approved by the citizens and adopted by the New Orleans City Planning Commission as part of our work for the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP).

The program operates at a manageable neighborhood scale of 9 blocks (3 by 3 grid) and proposes to physically move all healthy houses (an average of 15 per location) from a 2-acre block in the middle and relocate them to vacant or blighted lots on the surrounding 8 blocks. After relocating the houses, the cleared center block would be redeveloped as a new public open space. Our team is in discussion with The Trust for Public Land's New Orleans office to form a partnership that would program, manage and maintain the new park.

Participants will be compensated 100% with a one-time payment for their building lots and title to the lots where their houses are relocated. House moving costs and interim expenses would also be fully covered. The program would be 100% voluntary, with funds disbursed on a first-come basis from Louisiana's federally funded, multi-billion Dollar road home initiative that provides a one-time tax-deductible payment of up to $150,000 to homeowners that move back and repair their homes or sell their properties outright to the government.
The estimated cost for each neighborhood nine-block area including house moving, administrative and legal fees, landscape and infrastructure is $5 million with the projected start date on the 3rd anniversary of Katrina.

This “triple-win” program creates benefits for individual homeowners, the neighborhoods and the city. Blighted houses and vacant lots are redeveloped to move back into the private market. The public open space network is augmented and improved through the creation of valuable new park land. The program will produce neighborhood-scale planning and design benefits that include filling in undeveloped street corners and “missing teeth,” improving property value by forestalling the “jack-o-lantern effect,” creating continuous rows of housing and providing safety with “eyes on the street” through increased density and a more mindful neighborhood.

NEW ORLEANS SHOTGUN LOFTHOUSE FOR GLOBAL GREEN

Utilizing existing resources and structures offers a cost-effective, energy-efficient way to help alleviate the housing crisis. Historically, New Orleans’s revered “shotgun houses” have weathered the storms and rising waters. By interpreting the effective principles and proportions of these houses, we created a super-sustainable, award-winning new typology for New Orleans.

Our multi-family Shotgun LoftHouse reinvents a time-proven climate-driven housing type for both the Holy Cross neighborhood and the city. In terms of its architecture, site planning and economics, the Shotgun LoftHouse is pragmatic, ecological, economical, efficient, innovative, relevant and realistic.

Density and shared party walls minimize the exterior exposure of the units and therefore conserve materials, as well as energy. The building is lifted four feet off the ground for ventilation, positive airflow and flood prevention. The garden-facing elevation is a vertical stacking of deep southern porches with shared stairways covered by lush vines that utilize storm water runoff. Porches facing the Mississippi River are outfitted with a dual-protection shuttering system for the hurricane season. Windows, waterproofing, insulation, air barriers and finishes are prefabricated off-site to insure a tight and efficient building envelope. Roof water collection nourishes a lush landscape that includes filtration pools for treatment of grey water and storm run-off.

The design and construction utilizes regional, renewable and post-Katrina recycled materials (telephone poles, southern pine, recycled steel, recycled wood floors), as well as passive design (cross-unit ventilation and chimney-effect cooling, deep porch shading, green and PV-panel shaded roofs) to reduce energy for cooling (preserves natural resources and reduces carbon emissions). The design, construction and operation factors a 93% reduction in energy costs as compared to standard projects for the multi-family units, while the single family homes will produce more energy than they consume.
Laflite Housing: existing street grid and proposed grid to connect the public housing with the neighborhood.
Historic houses at center moved to surrounding vacant lots; lots filled in and blocks of housing making a whole that faces a new public park.