



THE BULLETIN

A DAILY NEWS UPDATE ON THE MISSISSIPPI RENEWAL FORUM IN BILOXI • OCTOBER 15, 2005

Design teams to present plans

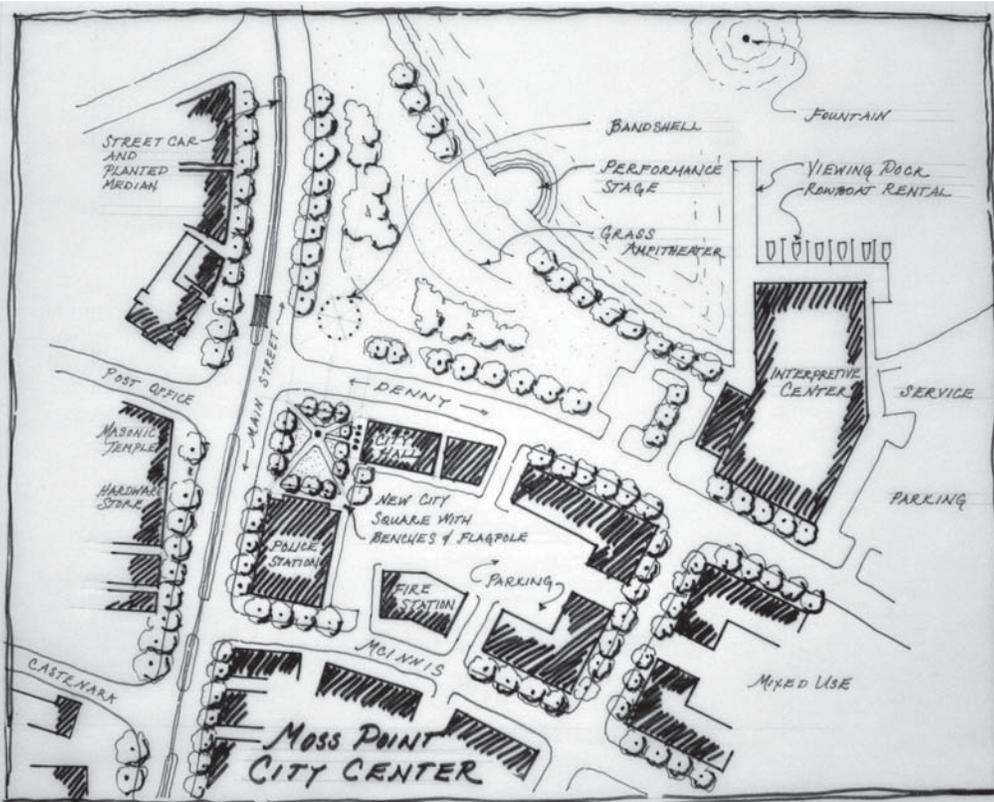
Today, local officials in 11 towns and three coastal counties get their first peek at design teams' interpretation of their goals for rebuilding and renewal in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This afternoon's presentations follow an intensive day and night of planning and drawing on Friday. After officials react to their work today, the designers revise plans and drawings on Sunday for final presentations the following day.

Here's a glimpse at the activity at the 11 planning tables on Friday, starting with **Moss Point**:

Newly elected Mayor Xavier Bishop now has a standard reply to those who ask what it felt like to have a hurricane sweep through his town when he was in office all of two months. "I told people I was going to bring about change," he said.

Bishop was deep into the planning mode on Friday, working on a table of local and national design specialists at

Plans for a new Moss Point city center



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CHRISTINE FRANCK



Moss Point Mayor Xavier Bishop, at right in photo, works with urban designer Steven Schukraft on a plan. A design for a new city hall is shown above.



SANDY SORLIEN

the Mississippi Renewal Forum. Even though Katrina damage in Moss Point was less than in surrounding communities, the mayor said he saw the Forum as an opportunity "to establish a vision where there wasn't one."

Steven Schukraft, based in Washington, D.C. with HOK's Planning Group, is helping with the Moss Point redesign, which includes a reworking of the downtown. "The big thing that happened to the downtown," says Schukraft, "is that a new highway bridge created a big gap in the traditional downtown network of streets. This provides us with the ability to

recreate that early grid."

Among the proposals: Moving city hall, flooded by Katrina, to a site that allows for a more traditional town square; new police and fire department buildings that help establish a civic building influence on the streetscapes; two and three-story downtown live-work space to stimulate downtown activity. The team is suggesting both a trolley and natural walking path connecting Moss Point to Pascagoula's town center three miles away.

Mayor Bishop, who worked alongside designers for much of Friday, said he's encouraging them "to raise the bar and be creative."

THE BULLETIN

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www.mississippirenewal.com

Pass Christian

Based on what citizens and local officials have said, residents by and large would like to keep the feel of a laid-back fishing village while at the same time rebuilding a tax base that will be hit hard by the likely departure of a Wal-Mart, which was destroyed in the storm. "We're thinking they might be able to do that by becoming a magnet for regional tourism that's not casino-driven," said planner Howard Blackson.

One idea is to create a second marina. The first would remain a working

marina for the oyster fleet, while the second would be a center for recreational boating and fishing. With golf, a restored beach boardwalk and other activities rounding out the local offerings, visitors could be drawn to a hotel and a modest number of condos that would help to restore the tax base. "Condos don't have to be high-rise and these shouldn't be," Blackson said. Rather, they could be built on the model of the lost antebellum homes, with four or so units to a building. Visitors could enjoy beach walks and water sports by day, then take the proposed street car or light rail to Biloxi's casinos by night.

"The key likely will be to maintain the traditional feel and the strong Southern character," Blackson said.

Several other ideas also are in play, and will become part of a set of options to be revised as work continues through the weekend.

Gulfport

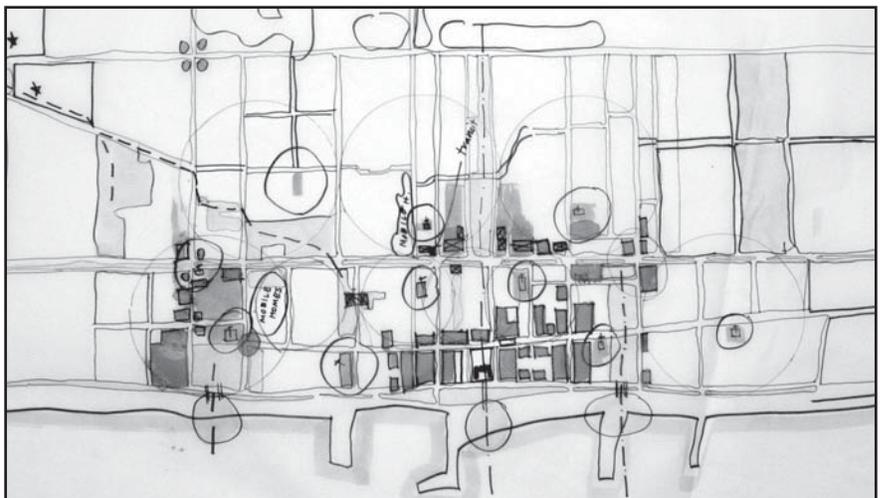
Brent Warr was less than two months into his first term as mayor when Katrina struck, wiping out shoreline neighborhoods and dealing a brutal setback to his hopes of bringing a renaissance to the Mississippi Coast's largest city with its large-scale port, faded downtown financial district, and timeworn antebellum mansions.

Although the hurricane also leveled the men's clothing store that Warr's

family has owned for generations and that he managed for well over a decade, Warr is anything but down. Since the start of the charrette's real working sessions Thursday evening, he has shown an irrepressible spirit and established himself as a full-time-and-then-some member of the Gulfport charrette team. "He took the team out for dinner last night, drove us back to the hotel around 10. Then he was here early this morning," reports James Moore, team leader and Tampa-based architect from HDR/LCA Sargent Town Planning. "He doesn't quit."

With a design savvy, tenaciousness about details, and an unyielding belief in Gulfport's potential, Warr has thoroughly impressed the planners, designers, and engineers on his team, just as he has worked to squeeze maximum value from every moment with them. Earlier in the day, he sat side-by-side with architect Joanna Alimanestianu of Brussels, Belgium, trying to solve a knotty problem - how to keep trains flowing to and from the city's active port without tying up downtown street traffic. The proposed solution: lifting the truck and rail lines above the streets on a European-styled walled viaduct whose underside would be developed with stores and offices to complete the streetscape. Later he told retail consultant Bob Gibbs about his hopes of consolidating port operations on one finger of land and developing another

A plan by Kimberly Brown envisions ideas for a new downtown in Pass Christian.



with a classic grand hotel and casino with a seaside promenade worthy of Monte Carlo and an intimate relationship to the downtown. Told of Gulfport's ability to dock cruise ships next to this urbane attraction, Gibbs said, "That's huge."

At press time, Mayor Warr was approximately where he had been all day - hunched over a map with pencil in hand, joining a designer in working out the question about whether the zoning in a beachside neighborhood will currently accommodate a condominium. "I'll never have this opportunity again - hopefully," said an only slightly weary Warr as midnight approached. "I'm proud to have it. I know it's too big an opportunity to waste."

Waveland

After Thursday's inspiring visit with citizens whose optimism and resiliency was nearly overwhelming, the planning team set to work with enthusiasm Friday morning. "These are people we have to look out for," team leader Robert Orr said. Throughout the day the team worked through about a half-dozen scenarios. The group sought to revive the homegrown shopping district along Coleman Street, with the city hall, library and community center, and a proposed pocket park as focal points.

Long discussions focused on how to integrate the larger group's proposal to use the right-of-way from a relocated freight line for a streetcar or light rail service. Team members also drew up ideas to beef up retail on Highway 90, while at the same time preserving the strong percentage of local ownership that exists now, even with the presence of a Wal-Mart, Lowe's and other "big box" stores. Late in the day the team was thrown a bit of a curveball when proposed new flood maps from FEMA seemed at first to alter the picture substantially. As the day ended, those issues remained to be resolved.

"We're devising a variety of options

for Waveland," said planner Patrick Pinnell. "We want to reinforce the existing street pattern, and expand the access to neighborhood parks, which the city already had begun to think about. We envision that over time a section of Highway 90 west of Nicholson would begin to acquire more of the character of Waveland, rather than a generic strip." Some ideas being considered include creating a boulevard effect with trees that create a screen, and zoning to keep large retailers near the intersections while building smaller buildings in between that would be more conducive to smaller, local shops.

Gautier

Compared to most of its neighbors, Gautier is relatively young, having incorporated only 20 years ago. A bedroom community to Pascagoula, Gautier has developed in primarily a conventional suburban pattern, with no discernible center and aggressive suburban development in the form of a 4,300-unit PUD, which is presently under construction. Because of this rapid growth—Gautier was the fastest growing city in the Gulf Coast region prior to Katrina—the city faces management issues that have little to do with Katrina, as well as recovery and rebuilding problems stemming directly from the hurricane's damage.

Gautier is unique among the surrounding communities, too, in that it is not a beach town, per se; instead, it boasts miles of bayou frontage and varying levels of park land. These green spaces include a fish and wildlife preserve that is habitat for sandhill cranes, a 10,000-acre parcel that borders downtown on three sides, and a state park embedded into the heart of the town. Not surprisingly, the residents and leadership of Gautier see ecotourism as a viable path toward future economic stability.

In the wake of a recent annexation to the west that more than doubled the geographic size of the community,

Gautier's primary opportunity lies in leveraging the economic and scenic value of its land without biting the hand of potential ecotourism. Development options include the creation of a downtown core, shoreline development that is consistent with the community's ecotourism goals, preservation of park lands, and connections between the downtown, a potential light rail stop, and Hwy 90.

Pascagoula

In that city where homes were destroyed along the beach and many more damaged, the planning team headed by John Ellis of WRT/Solomon E.T.C. is looking well beyond the problem of rebuilding destroyed houses. The team is exploring how a potential light rail line could bring vitality to downtown and how more shops could be lured into the city, which is currently underserved by retail. The historic rail station next to the CSX tracks, adjacent to downtown, is a possible light rail station. The team is also designing an enhanced, mixed-use, trolley-served boulevard from the downtown to the beach.

Along the western waterfront of the city, which is currently dominated by industrial uses, the introduction of low- to mid-rise residential buildings may be proposed. Also needed in Pascagoula is more green space - one idea is to move an existing golf course to a new location and create a linear public park.

Ocean Springs

While the coastline along Ocean Springs was devastated, the inland areas are recovering well after Katrina. Because of this, the community should be one of the first to bounce back from the storm.

With an influx of new residents about to come knocking, Ocean Springs needs to look for development opportunities in key areas: Highway 90 as it enters the town; and the harbor, which holds options for mixed-use develop-

ment. Since waterfront development will play a major role in Ocean Springs' renewal, options for appropriate building design are crucial.

One approach would be to construct mixed-use buildings that are fortified against storm surges, with an elevated promenade facing the boat slips. In this design, parking and limited retail could be located on the ground floor. A second option could allow for more retail on a waterproofed ground floor, an approach that has met with success in Fort Myers Beach, Florida.

Biloxi

"What we're doing," said Biloxi architect David Hardy, "is trying to repair damage done long before the hurricane by urban renewal" and other failed planning strategies. One of the bad decisions was a loop road around Biloxi's historic downtown that defeated the traditional street grid.

Hardy and others on the team - which includes Los Angeles architect-planners Stefanos Polyzoides and Elizabeth Moule - are reestablishing the grid and proposing an infill strategy of four and five-story buildings with retail and office on ground floors and residences above. The new design potentially adds some 500 new residential units.

The plan is straight-forward and easy-to-sell, says Hardy. "Totally doable. We'd rather offer something like this than something farther out that will just sit on the shelf."

Bay St. Louis

The city faces design challenges in its connective tissue and its attempts to restore its historic buildings.

Preliminary design work includes one approach to linking the town's three traditional commercial areas into a greater whole. Several "gateway" opportunities exist also, including an entry from Highway 90 to the beach, and between Waveland the Bay St. Louis. Connection options include additional routes to I-10, plus connect-

ing an existing historic train depot to the traditional main street. Improvements to Beach Boulevard are possible, including expanded parking, stronger pedestrian links, and eased congestion.

On the architectural front, design team members are analyzing how to rebuild the community's historic buildings—even those that were completely obliterated by Katrina. Restoring the city's housing options is another consideration; the team is exploring courtyard buildings and other, similar types, looking for more sturdy options that can be sited in a "mother and children" configuration, where buildings are layered with the beachside ones being hardened to serve as protective buffers for the smaller, less-expensive dwellings behind them.

Long Beach

Aesthetics and practicality are merging in the developing plans for the City of Long Beach. Responding to traffic flow problems on Main Street, design team members envision the creation of a civic square half a mile from the beach at the north end of Main Street, which would anchor that street and help to free up traffic flow. A pair of pedestrian-oriented streets could connect the University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast campus to Main Street.

D'Iberville

The main focus of the D'Iberville team on Friday was the area along the bay, the neighborhoods that sustained the most severe damage. In eleven neighborhood centers, each with a different motif and purpose, the team proposed denser development centered around schools or retail and service-based areas.

Closest to the coast, the team envisioned a neighborhood reminiscent of New Orleans, with arcade-lined streets, cafes, restaurants, and retail, and two additional stories on each building for housing. The team explained that buildings will be "built like a ship," dry-proof up to a certain height. Along the bay itself is a layer of wetlands and

mangroves, which act as flood control while providing an open, natural area adjacent to hotels and casinos.

The approach got raves from Mayor Rusty Quave when he visited the planners' table.

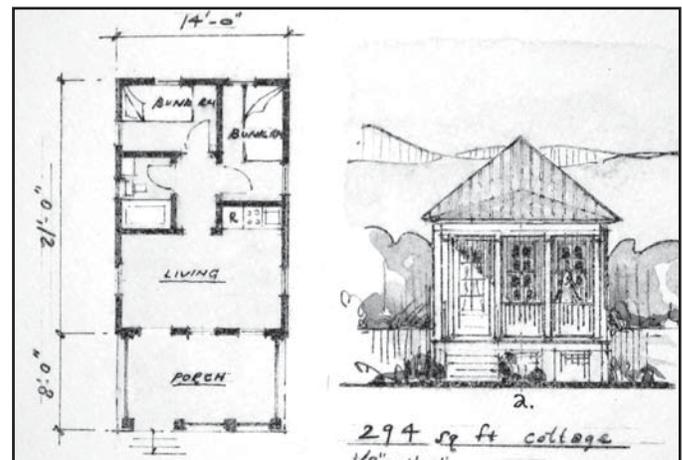
Affordability with style

Multiple solutions related to design, regulation, and public investment were suggested to promote affordable housing in Mississippi Gulf communities. Biloxi architect Walter Bolton notes that his city had many low- to moderate-income residents, some of the senior citizens and others employees of the gaming and seafood industries. "People want to live in houses similar to those that they had before, on the same street, with the same neighbors," he said.

CNU president and CEO John Norquist noted that offering a variety of housing types will add to affordability. Architect team members Marianne Cusato and Eric Moser designed some attractive but small shotgun units that could be built with manufactured housing. The basic structure of Cusato's 294-square-foot, one-bedroom unit could be built for \$25,000. Moser designed several shotgun units, including a 672 square foot, two bedroom unit.

Bolton noted that grants of up to \$26,000 are available for uninsured income-qualified residents who lost homes. Those funds could be supple-

Shotgun cottage by Marianne Cusato



mented by low-income loans available through the Small Business Administration, he said.

Miami architect Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk suggested that legislation is needed to require a percentage of affordable housing in new developments, a solution that has worked in Montgomery County, Maryland, and other places. "There's a toolkit required - more than one solution is needed," she said.

Light rail discussed

One transportation idea much talked about in the Renewal Forum is a rail transit loop that would connect all the communities along Mississippi's Gulf Coast. The current CSX rail line - which many public officials would like to move farther inland - consists of a single set of tracks, which could be converted to a one-way transit line, said Norman Garrick, an engineer and transportation specialist from the University of Connecticut. The CSX line varies from a quarter-mile to three-quarters of a mile from the coast. "There used to be a historical [streetcar] track on the seafront," Garrick pointed out. If the old streetcar line were reestablished and the CSX line were converted to light-rail transit, the region would have a circuit, which, according to Garrick, "would help define the coastal area. It would help define the place."

The pair of transit lines could be used to encourage nodes of intense development in Biloxi and Gulfport and to deliver riders to other destinations, such as collections of artists and restaurants in Waveland, Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, and Ocean Springs. Like the Gold Line, which runs between downtown Los Angeles and Pasadena, a light-rail line on the Gulf Coast could operate its vehicles at relatively low speeds in some urbanized areas and run faster in less densely settled areas.

Mississippians have described the current CSX line as a problem, partly because it divides neighborhoods and

communities. Garrick said it's not principally the tracks and the elevation of the right-of-way that cause the division; in most places, the tracks generally are no more than five feet higher than the surrounding land, Garrick noted. The problem, he said, is "the big old freight trains," which are long and noisy and which sometimes hold up traffic.

Garrick and his compatriots in transportation planning have dubbed the proposed pair of transit routes the "Bayou Loop." They have even come up with a slogan for the route: "It Goes Right Bayou."

What they're saying

NPR's Morning Edition, Oct. 14, reporter David Schaper

SCHAPER: "... But some in the Gulf Coast area aren't ready to jump on the smart-growth, new urbanism bandwagon just yet. In fact, many local officials initially recoiled at the idea that these outside experts would come into town for a whirlwind of a few days, telling them how to rebuild and then leave. Among them was the mayor of Gulfport, Brent Warr."

Mayor BRENT WARR (Gulfport, Mississippi): "I have to tell you, this is exactly, exactly what we needed and what we need. I haven't seen one piece of it yet that wasn't dead-on track."

SCHAPER: Warr now embraces having this expert advice, knowing that at the end of the six-day forum on Monday, the teams of planners will present his city with a menu of several different kinds of ideas and designs for the massive rebuilding challenges facing it, none of which his city has to select. Governor Haley Barbour was clear in stating at the start of the forum that the final rebuilding and redevelopment decisions for each Gulf Coast community must be made by the local officials. But he also insists that the reconstruction of the Mississippi Gulf Coast be done right, with an end result better than what was here before.

Quick takes

● There has been concern among the municipal charrette teams about FEMA's new flood elevation guidance on building form. For instance, for Hancock County FEMA is advising that new flood elevations may be six to eight feet higher than previously. As a result, in some locations new construction must have a first floor one or even two stories above grade (depending on the elevation at grade) in order to qualify for FEMA flood insurance.

The Regional Planning team's discussion of FEMA's new Advisory Flood Elevations will span a range of possible responses together with the pros and cons of each option. Options range from reconstruction of existing areas, to surge mitigation strategies such as wave barriers and buffers, to relocation of entire neighborhoods. The Regional team's discussion of the pros and cons of different options is paralleling the municipal teams' finer-scale explorations of redevelopment strategies.

FEMA's updated Flood Advisory Maps were released very recently and incorporate the statistical influences of Hurricane Katrina. FEMA is working with the charrette teams to generate maps with very small topographic line intervals so that the actual, recommended elevation of buildings above the grade can be calculated. The Regional team will combine FEMA maps with regional soil maps that show the most saturated soils in order to identify the most flood-prone and highest-risk locations.

● Among the biggest challenges may be creating a plan for moving formerly floating casinos onto dry land. Mississippi legislation was recently approved to allow that to occur. Andres Duany suggested Nice, in the French Riviera, as a precedent. "Nice looks just like Biloxi, but the buildings are great," Duany said, adding that some people are threatened by high-rise casino buildings. If such construction is going to happen anyway, it is better to make these building great, he said, rather

than fight it, lose the battle, and get poor quality construction.

● Before coming to Biloxi, the visiting design team was cautioned not to overuse the vernacular of New Urbanism - including the *charrette* term. Lose the French, talk Mississippi, was the advice.

They needn't have worried. South Mississippi's French heritage predates New Urbanism by a couple centuries. D'Iberville, after all, is one of the 11 towns the team is studying in the six-day Biloxi charrette that's officially called the Mississippi Renewal Forum. Even the governor, Haley Barbour, had a little fun at the expense of the charrette crowd. In his opening remarks on the Forum's first day, he got laughs from a standing-room-only audience by professing that, before the New Urbanists came to town, the only French word he knew was *bon-bon*. "But I suppose bourbon is French," he added.

The best Mississippi-ficaction of New Urbanist French came from Governor's Commission staffer Joe Cloyd. Despite losing his own Biloxi home in the hurricane, Joe has been doing much of the ground work in the region to insure this particular charrette's success. And he's provided Mississippi vernacular for its local participants: *S'hretters*.

If the name has the staying power it deserves, Joe wants royalties.

● Many people are working hard behind the scenes to help the charrette function effectively, often local staff whose own lives have been seriously disrupted by Katrina. Today's "unsung hero" is Ken Holland, planner/GIS specialist with the Gulf Regional Planning Commission. Ken has provided exceptional support for the past week in assembling critically important data, connecting charrette participants with key community officials, and even arranging the loan of a much-needed plotter. "Ken's done this while also trying to repair his home and resettle his family. He's one of many people who are making extraordinary efforts behind the scenes to help the rest of us do our work," says Eliot Allen.