

# Preliminary Report



## Community Congress II December 2, 2006

New Orleans, Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Dallas, Houston & 16 other cities

More than 2,500 New Orleanians gathered for Community Congress II, a large-scale community meeting that took place simultaneously in 21 cities. The unique interactive assembly connected participants in New Orleans with those in the four cities with the largest number of Katrina evacuees – Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Dallas, and Houston through satellite technology. Meetings held in public libraries and community organizations in 16 other cities engaged other members of the diaspora via webcast in this critical conversation.

Community Congress II focused on updating New Orleans residents on recovery efforts, creating a public dialogue to identify rebuilding priorities, and strengthening public awareness for continued recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Participants began the day-long Community Congress by sharing their ideas on the most important elements to preserve and to change as New Orleans is rebuilt. The next discussions focused on identifying and prioritizing action-based solutions on six key aspects of rebuilding: 1) Flood Protection; 2) Roads, Transit and Utilities; 3) Neighborhood Stability; 4) Rental and Affordable Housing; 5) Education and Health Services; and 6) Other Public Services. Finally, citizens weighed in on what needs to happen in order to ensure that the necessary resources are available to allow these ideas to be put into action.



### Who Attended Community Congress II?

UNOP sought participants that represent the diversity of pre-Katrina New Orleans. Participants' demographics are compared below to the pre-Katrina demographics of the city, according to 2000 Census Bureau data.

<u>I Am Participating in...</u>	<u>Dec 2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Dec 2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>
New Orleans	60%		15 to 19	2%	7%
Houston	13%		20 to 34	12%	22.6%
Dallas	11%		35 to 44	16%	14.8%
Baton Rouge	8%		45 to 54	27%	13.1%
Atlanta	8%		55 to 64	27%	7.8%
			Over 65	16%	11.7%
<u>Location of Residence</u>	<u>Dec 2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Dec 2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>
District 1	19.3%	1.4%	African-American	64%	67.3%
District 2	13.7%	9.8%	Asian	4%	2.3%
District 3	11.9%	13.8%	Caucasian	27%	28.1%
District 4	11.4%	16.4%	Hispanic/Latino	2%	3.1%
District 5	10.0%	5.3%	Native American	0%	0.2%
District 6	7.4%	9.1%	More than one race	2%	1.3%
District 7	6.6%	8.5%	Other	1%	1%
District 8	5.9%	4.0%			
District 9	4.8%	16.8%	<u>Income</u>	<u>Dec 2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>
District 10	4.6%	2.7%	Less than \$20,000	25%	35%
District 11	3.1%	0.4%	\$20,000 - \$39,999	22%	24%
District 12	0.8%	11.5%	\$40,000 - \$59,999	17%	15%
District 13	0.5%	0.2%	\$60,000 - \$74,999	8%	7%
<u>Home Ownership</u>	<u>Dec 2<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>Actual Pre-Katrina</u>	More than \$75,000	20%	19%
Home Owner	65%	46%	Don't know/	7%	N/A
Renter	29%	54%	Prefer not to answer		
Other	6%	N/A			

## How Did Community Congress II Work?

Community Congress II is a part of a process to develop the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP). The meeting was organized and facilitated by AmericaSpeaks, a non partisan, non-profit organization. AmericaSpeaks raised private funds to pay for Community Congress II – no recovery dollars were used for this meeting. The Unified New Orleans Plan process was established by the Mayor, the City Council, and the City Planning Commission on July 5, 2006. It is funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Greater New Orleans Foundation, and the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund.

Participants at Community Congress II were divided into small groups of 8-10, each with its own table facilitator. Throughout the day, the meeting's lead moderator presented discussion questions to the groups for conversation. The ideas from each discussion were collected with computers found at every table. The "theme team" reviewed the comments from all of the tables simultaneously and reported the common ideas back within minutes. Then using keypads, the participants reviewed and prioritized these ideas to develop a clear plan for action. The results from the polls were reported instantly to the group.

## What is Important in Rebuilding

Before focusing on the six issues involved in the rebuilding, participants began by sharing their experiences with New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina. They discussed those things which they particularly appreciate about New Orleans which should be preserved, as well as factors they would like to see changed as part of the rebuilding process.

### Things to Preserve

New Orleanians were asked to identify the most important things that they would want to preserve through the rebuilding process. The following themes emerged from the table conversations (not listed in any order):

- Ethnic, cultural, racial diversity
- Character of neighborhoods
- "Big city/small town atmosphere"
- "Spirit of New Orleans" – culture, food, music, etc.
- Recreation, green space, wetlands, parks
- Relationships – family, camaraderie
- Affordability – ability to live well without much
- "Don't knock down architecture that is still standing"
- Health care and medical facilities
- "Free to live the lifestyle you want"

### Things to Change

Participants also had the chance to discuss those things that they would like to see improved about New Orleans as part of the rebuilding. The following themes emerged from the table conversations (not listed in any order):

- Improve schools across the board
- Need a safer city
- Reduce poverty and pockets of low-income housing
- Preserve affordable home ownership opportunities
- More connection for families to stay together
- Create living-wage jobs, especially for young people
- Process of government
- Improved access to health care
- Infrastructure updates in all neighborhoods
- Levee improvements and wetlands restoration
- Address all populations, including the disabled
- More recreational and other opportunities for young people

## Do You Plan to Stay/Return to New Orleans?

When asked about their intentions to stay or return home:

- ◆ 40% Live in New Orleans now & intend to stay
- ◆ 9% Live in New Orleans now & are not sure if they will stay
- ◆ 2% Live in New Orleans now & intend to leave
- ◆ 30% Don't live in New Orleans now & hope to come back
- ◆ 14% Don't live in New Orleans & don't know if they want to come back
- ◆ 6% Don't live in New Orleans & don't intend to come

### Webcast Meetings Reach Many New Orleanians

Webcast meetings were held in 16 cities around the country to extend the reach of Community Congress II to other cities serving as temporary homes for New Orleanians. Participants at community meetings watched the proceedings from New Orleans through webcast technology. Using laptop computers, ideas were captured from their table conversations were captured and sent in real time to New Orleans where it was reviewed along with the feedback from other cities, serving as the basis of the themes.

Community Meetings took place in the following cities: Austin, TX; Charlotte, NC; Chicago, IL; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; Jackson, MS; Jacksonville, FL; Los Angeles, CA; Memphis, TN; Minneapolis, MN; New York, NY; Princeton, NJ; San Antonio, TX; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; and Washington, DC.

## Next Steps & Staying Involved

Your voice and involvement still matter. There are future opportunities to interact with your community regarding the unified planning process. District Meeting #3 will be held across the city on December 16 – 17. Next month, District Meeting #4 will be held on January 6-7 and Community Congress #3 will be held on January 13.

Check the UNOP website for updates on the meeting times and location, and sign up for the weekly UNOP Eletter. If you cannot access the website, you can call 1-877-527-3284 for all UNOP updated information.

You can also share your thoughts with Community Support Organization, the advisory board for UNOP. Future dates include Dec 7 and 21, Jan 11 and 25. All of these meetings will be held from 5:30 to 7:30 pm at the City Council Chamber.

## Roads, Transit and Utilities

Next, participants focused on what should be done to rebuild New Orleans' infrastructure. Discussions at tables opened with conversation on three options developed by UNOP to repair roads, the transit system, and city utilities. Later, participants voted to show their level of support for these options, based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 signifying very low support and 5 signifying very high support:

### 1. Spread available funds evenly throughout the city.

- 1 – Very low level of support – 59%
- 2 – Low level of support – 16%
- 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 10%
- 4 – High level of support – 7%
- 5 – Very high level of support – 9%

### 2. Concentrate available recovery funds in areas of the city with the greatest need.

- 1 – Very low level of support – 12%
- 2 – Low level of support – 8%
- 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 12%
- 4 – High level of support – 28%
- 5 – Very high level of support – 39%

### 3. Raise additional funds, possibly through higher taxes or user fees, so that all infrastructure can be repaired and improved.

- 1 – Very low level of support – 30%
- 2 – Low level of support – 11%
- 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 14%
- 4 – High level of support – 18%
- 5 – Very high level of support – 26%

Then tables developed their own options and strategies for rebuilding this infrastructure. Finally, participants reviewed and voted on all of the options (both those developed by UNOP and those suggested by participants) to select the options they believe most important to adopt. All options are listed below in order of priority – *the options developed by participants are in italics*:

1. Concentrate funds in areas with the greatest need. (43%)
2. *Focus on making quality of infrastructure equal across city.* (33%)
3. *Get additional funds from the business community (casinos, etc.).* (32%)
4. *Look into alternative types of energy & transportation.* (28%)
5. *Combine options 2 & 3.* (26%)
6. *Spend in areas of greatest population return.* (26%)
7. Raise additional funds so that all infrastructure can be repaired and improved. (17%)
8. Spread available funds for repairs evenly throughout the city. (16%)
9. *Consider alternative taxation options.* (14%)

## Flood Protection

Next, participants focused on what should be done to reduce the risk of flooding. Discussions at tables opened with conversation on three options developed by UNOP to further protect New Orleans from flooding. Later, participants voted to show their level of support for these options, based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 signifying very low support and 5 signifying very high support:

### 1. Residents and businesses use the best available information to make personal decisions about flood prevention.

- 1 – Very low level of support - 38%
- 2 – Low level of support – 12%
- 3 – Neither high nor low level of support -10%
- 4 – High level of support – 15%
- 5 – Very high level of support – 25%

### 2. Provide financial incentives to residents and businesses to reduce their flood risk.

- 1 – Very low level of support – 15%
- 2 – Low level of support – 9%
- 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 13%
- 4 – High level of support – 29%
- 5 – Very high level of support – 35%

### 3. Create and enforce standards and programs to reduce flood risk.

- 1 – Very low level of support – 14%
- 2 – Low level of support – 7%
- 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 9%
- 4 – High level of support – 22%
- 5 – Very high level of support – 49%

Then tables developed their own options and strategies for reducing the risk of flood. Finally, participants reviewed and voted on all of the options (both those developed by UNOP and those suggested by participants) to select the options they believe most important to adopt. All options are listed below in order of priority – *the options developed by participants are in italics*:

1. *Effective Category 5 levees have to be built faster, regardless of what homeowners do – more pumping stations, look to the Dutch.* (58%)
2. *Apply holistic approach – wetlands rebuilding and conservation are part of flood protection.* (39%)
3. *Combine #2 (financial incentives) with #3 (standards): provides standards while still giving people choice.* (36%)
4. *Make flood insurance mandatory and affordable.* (33%)
5. *Close MRGO.* (26%)
6. *Refine #3: Need different standards for different parts of the city – flooding due to different reasons (broken levees and storm surge) while ensuring affordability to residents.* (25%)
7. Provide financial incentives to reduce flood risk. (18%)
8. Create and enforce standards and programs to reduce flood risk. (18%)
9. Use best available information to make personal decisions about flood protection. (9%)

## Rental and Affordable Housing

Participants voted to show their level of support for these options, based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 signifying very low support and 5 signifying very high support:

- 1. Rely on market forces and existing programs to create rental and affordable housing.**
  - 1 – Very low level of support – 45%
  - 2 – Low level of support – 14%
  - 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 11%
  - 4 – High level of support – 9%
  - 5 – Very high level of support – 21%
- 2. Fund the development of transitional housing for workers.**
  - 1 – Very low level of support – 32%
  - 2 – Low level of support – 13%
  - 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 16%
  - 4 – High level of support – 18%
  - 5 – Very high level of support – 20%
- 3. Provide financial incentives to developers to build affordable housing.**
  - 1 – Very low level of support – 36%
  - 2 – Low level of support – 9%
  - 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 9%
  - 4 – High level of support – 16%
  - 5 – Very high level of support – 30%
- 4. Fund the development of low- and moderate-income public housing.**
  - 1 – Very low level of support – 27%
  - 2 – Low level of support – 9%
  - 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 11%
  - 4 – High level of support – 18%
  - 5 – Very high level of support – 35%

All options are listed below in order of priority – *the options developed by participants are in italics*:

1. *Create homeownership opportunities for low-income and public housing residents, such as mixed-income development: “We reject any option that would concentrate poverty.” (15.8%)*
2. *Refine #4: connect public housing with job training and support services. (13%)*
3. *Provide housing priority for evacuees so we can come back. (12.5%)*
4. *Consider rent caps to increase affordable rental options. (11.7%)*
5. *Sell or develop vacant and/or abandoned property to accelerate repopulation. (10.6%)*
6. *Subsidize and assist small property owners to lease affordable units. (8.6%)*
7. *Provide immediate housing – “clean out and repair” existing public housing. (6.5%)*
8. *Combine #3 and #4: provide incentives and public housing: “It’s the right thing to do.” (5.7%)*
9. *Provide financial incentives to build affordable housing. (5.4%)*
10. *Rely on market forces and existing programs to create rental and affordable housing. (3.9%)*
11. *Fund low- and moderate-income public housing. (3.5%)*
12. *Fund transitional housing for workers. (2.9%)*

## Neighborhood Stability

Participants focused on what should be done to rebuild more stable neighborhoods. Discussions at tables opened with conversation on the three options developed by UNOP to help homemakers make critical decisions about their houses: repair; rebuild; tear down; or sell. Later, participants voted to show their level of support for these options, based on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 signifying very low support and 5 signifying very high support:

- 1. Homeowners make their own rebuilding decisions with the best available information.**
  - 1 – Very low level of support – 18%
  - 2 – Low level of support – 10%
  - 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 10%
  - 4 – High level of support – 17%
  - 5 – Very high level of support – 45%
- 2. Provide financial incentives for people to rebuild near one another.**
  - 1 – Very low level of support – 13%
  - 2 – Low level of support – 10%
  - 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 13%
  - 4 – High level of support – 23%
  - 5 – Very high level of support – 42%
- 3. Set and enforce standards for homeowners to rebuild one another.**
  - 1 – Very low level of support – 44%
  - 2 – Low level of support – 14%
  - 3 – Neither high nor low level of support – 11%
  - 4 – High level of support – 11%
  - 5 – Very high level of support – 20%

Then tables developed their own options and strategies for neighborhood stability. Finally, participants reviewed and voted on all of the options (both those developed by UNOP and those suggested by participants) to select the options they believe most important to adopt. All options are listed below in order of priority – *the options developed by participants are in italics*:

1. *Provide incentives for homeowners to buy blighted property in their neighborhoods quickly & easily. (57%)*
2. *Homeowners make their own rebuilding decisions with the best available information. (42%)*
3. *Neighborhood-based approach focusing on realities of neighborhoods – “one size does not fit all.” (39%)*
4. *Provide financial incentives for people to rebuild near one another. (38%)*
5. *Find alternate uses for blighted properties – public space & parks. (37%)*
6. *Let people choose where to rebuild but tear down blighted homes. (36%)*
7. *Establish and enforce standards for homeowners to rebuild near one another. (11%)*
8. *Developers should build new housing in clusters. (7%)*