

A Report from the Bureau of  
Governmental Research

# NOT READY FOR PRIME TIME

An Analysis of  
the UNOP Citywide Plan

March 2007



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*Several directors recused themselves from review of this report due to associations with the Unified New Orleans Plan process, the Louisiana Recovery Authority and/or the City Planning Commission.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Final Draft of the Citywide Strategic Recovery and Rebuilding Plan (the Citywide Plan) was delivered to the City Planning Commission and released for public comment at the end of January. It is the product of a public-private partnership, known as the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) process. The Citywide Plan is supposed to serve as the strategic guide for the future investment of funds by the LRA and other state and federal agencies to support the continuous rebuilding of communities in Orleans Parish. It is critical that New Orleans get it right.

The UNOP process held great promise. It employed highly regarded local and national planners and experts at various levels of the project. Multiple teams of planners worked to produce 13 District Plans. Another group of planners and experts was charged with stitching the District Plans together into a Citywide Plan. In this report, BGR addresses only the Citywide Plan, not the individual District Plans.

The Citywide Plan has its strengths. Much of the data gathered is excellent, and parts of the analysis contained in the Citywide Baseline Recovery Assessment (an appendix) are top-flight. There was a world of good intentions and millions of dollars behind the process.

But all of this only adds to the disappointment that the Citywide Plan product inspires. In the end, the document fails to deliver a cohesive, workable roadmap for recovery. Instead, it proposes a sweeping list of 91 projects, without placing them in a realistic financial context. As for recovery strategy, it offers a continuation of the indecisive and confusing approach that has characterized New Orleans' recovery for a year and a half.

The Citywide Plan is internally inconsistent and not well-crafted. It fails to establish practical criteria or mechanisms for targeting and phasing investment. It fails to set clear priorities in key areas or put forth realistic timelines. Rather, it:

- Pledges its allegiance to abstract, unexplained principles.

- Employs a vague and bewildering system for scoring projects.
- Offers programmatic ideas without critical implementation information in some areas, and fails to connect findings with policies in others.
- Envisions and ranks projects without taking into account realistic levels of funding.
- Makes several premature recommendations.

Some of the results of the plan are difficult to understand. According to the priority list (see Appendix), the key projects for recovery are a new Louisiana State University/Veterans Affairs hospital complex and housing for dislocated public housing residents. Yet fundamentals that affect everyone in the city, like improvements to the crumbling streets, antiquated sewer/water/drainage systems, and deteriorated schools, fall somewhere in the middle of the wish list. Repairing and restoring the city's historic forts ranks on the same level as these essential infrastructure items.

The Citywide Plan is enigmatic on key issues. It does not detail or provide a map showing where its programs and policies would apply. This makes it difficult or impossible for citizens to use it as a guide to understand the proposals applicable to their neighborhoods. It sets forth oblique distinctions in prioritizing infrastructure and street improvements.

The plan does not openly confront certain critical issues. For example, it explains at length the higher vulnerability of eastern New Orleans. It also espouses safety as a guiding principle. But, having set off alarm bells, it does not follow its findings through with comprehensive remedies for that area or its residents. In fact, it recommends significant funding for resettlement of people living in areas at a high risk of future flooding without requiring that the resettlement areas be located at lower-risk sites. To alleviate risk, it suggests the use of flood-proofing measures, such as elevating homes. This contrasts with the underlying Citywide Baseline Recovery Assessment, which states: "New Orleans cannot afford to rebuild infrastructure in areas of high flood risk, only to have another flood destroy those facilities again. The state

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and nation would soon lose patience with such a policy. ... As a matter of public policy, investment in physical infrastructure in high risk areas should be avoided or at least minimized.”

## Conclusion and Recommendations

To be sure, the Citywide Plan faced tight time constraints for completion. As a result, some glitches were to be expected. The Citywide team has acknowledged that there are problems and invited constructive criticism to guide revisions. Unfortunately, the problems with the current Citywide Plan are so fundamental that they cannot be addressed through minor adjustments. Addressing them properly will require a return to the basic data, fresh analysis and an overhaul of the planning document.

There are two options for moving forward. One is for the City Planning Commission to send the report back to the UNOP consultants so that they can address the analytical and other weaknesses. The other is for the City Planning Commission to take control of the document and process.

BGR is recommending the latter course. This would put the recovery planning process in step with the City Charter, which designates the City Planning Commission as the entity to prepare and recommend to the City Council plans for areas destroyed by disasters.\*

Specifically, BGR recommends the following:

- The City Planning Commission should create a clear, data-driven and practical recovery plan based on realistic financial considerations. To maintain momentum, the City Planning Commission should incorporate and build on useful data and concepts from the 13

District Plans, the Citywide Plan (particularly the Citywide Baseline Recovery Assessment) and other post-Katrina planning efforts.

- The Mayor’s recovery management team should collaborate closely with the City Planning Commission to assist it in preparing the plan.
- After completing the plan, the City Planning Commission should recommend it to the City Council for adoption.
- The City Council should amend the budget to provide the City Planning Commission with supplemental funding, as needed, to complete the plan.
- All funding for future planning efforts, whether from public or private sources, should be directed through the City Planning Commission.

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\*The Home Rule Charter of the City of New Orleans, Section 5-402 (3)(e) states: “The City Planning Commission shall ... [p]repare and recommend to the (City) Council ... [p]lans for the replanning, improvement, and reconstruction of ... areas or districts destroyed or seriously damaged by ... flood or other disaster.” The City Charter also designates the Commission as the entity with responsibility for preparing and submitting City capital programs to the Mayor. See Section 6-104.

## OVERVIEW OF THE UNOP PROCESS

The UNOP process emerged as an attempt to end the chaos that had engulfed New Orleans' recovery planning process by mid-2006. At that point, the first planning process initiated by the Mayor through his Bring New Orleans Back Commission had foundered. City Council had launched its own planning process, popularly known as the Lambert Plan. The City Planning Commission, the body charged by the charter with responsibility for producing a recovery plan, was sitting on the sideline with a vastly reduced staff. It never received resources to hire outside expertise.

Led by the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) and private parties, the UNOP process was conceived as an attempt to restore order and credibility to recovery planning, unify disparate planning efforts, and fill the gaps left by previous plans. According to UNOP's website, the plan was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation (\$3.5 million), the Greater New Orleans Foundation (\$1 million), and the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund (\$1 million), with additional support from Daimler Chrysler. AmericaSpeaks raised supplemental money to support the Community Congresses. A Community Support Foundation provided general organizational and fiscal oversight, while a Community Support Organization was formed to hear citizen comments.

Planning was to proceed on several fronts. Teams of planners were to work with neighborhoods to develop recovery plans; these were to be folded into unified plans for the City's 13 planning districts (the District Plans). A Citywide Planning team was charged with assessing damage, developing a common vision, and synthesizing the District Plans into an overall plan for recovery.

UNOP organizers held large community meetings so that neighborhoods could vote to pick their own planners. The various district planners held at least four meetings for each district to develop its plans. In October, the citywide planners produced a "Citywide Baseline Recovery Assessment," which contains critical data. In October, December and January, they held "Community Congresses" that entailed massive outreach efforts and the employment of cutting-edge participation technology.

## The Citywide Plan at a Glance

The UNOP Citywide Plan is broken into five sections:

**Section 1:** *The Recovery Assessment provides a parish overview, a list of city planning areas, a discussion of Katrina's impacts, and overviews of the recovery and the UNOP process.*

**Section 2:** *The Citywide Recovery Framework discusses recovery needs, population trends, future risk of flooding, "Recovery Scenarios" and community feedback on them, strategic planning and recovery, and district-wide plans.*

**Section 3:** *The Summary of Recovery Projects works through the priority projects by category. Categories include flood protection, neighborhood stabilization, housing, economic development, infrastructure, transportation, education, community services and historic preservation/urban design.*

**Section 4:** *The Implementation section recommends approaches to governance, assigns roles to government entities, suggests staffing increases, and states that regulatory changes will have to be made.*

**Section 5:** *The Financial Plan lays out principles for decision-making, lists government agencies and foundations that might be able to provide resources, and gives estimates of how much the desired projects would cost.*

In addition, the Citywide Plan contains five appendices, including a compilation of "Project Description Sheets" for each of the 91 proposed projects; a breakdown of projects by planning district; an overview of the results of the Community Congresses; a 160-page Citywide Baseline Recovery Assessment, with analyses of each of the needs for each project category; and a Preliminary Citywide Financial Analysis.

The entire document can be viewed at [www.unifiedneworleansplan.com](http://www.unifiedneworleansplan.com).

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The product of the citywide effort, the Citywide Plan, was released at the end of January, in advance of the District Plans. The relationship between the Citywide Plan and the District Plans is unclear from the document, and, due to the later release of the district reports, BGR has not had time to independently ascertain whether they are consistent. In this report, BGR focuses solely on the Citywide Plan.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CITYWIDE PLAN

Billed as a recovery and rebuilding plan, the Citywide Plan is a document geared toward identifying and funding what it deems to be critical projects for the City during the next five to 10 years. The plan enunciates guiding principles, identifies core areas of concern, and sets forth policies, programs and projects for each. It prioritizes the top 91 projects and programs using a scoring system. It sets forth unspecific guidelines for allocating resources among the various areas of the city, based on rate of repopulation and degree of exposure to future flooding.

The Citywide Plan's "core programs" focus on flood-proofing measures, neighborhood stabilization, affordable housing, education and health care projects. In addition, the document recognizes the need to rebuild the bones of New Orleans — its infrastructure and transportation systems.

It also proposes a governance structure, recommending the creation of a Parishwide Recovery Council, composed of various public agencies and led by the Mayor's recovery manager. Finally, it sets forth a financial plan that consists of price tags for programs and a list of possible sources (such as federal and state departments and private foundations). See the Sidebar on page 3 for a brief description of the plan's sections.

## OUTCOMES OF THE CITYWIDE PLAN

For a city with a crippling crime problem, devastated infrastructure and a shortage of skilled workers and housing for them, some of the priorities set forth in the Citywide Plan are surprising. Building a new LSU/VA hospital and providing housing for former public housing residents are the two most highly ranked projects.

Implementing the far-ranging investments called for in the City Park Master Plan outranks the repair of high priority roads, addressing the needs of the sewer and wastewater systems, and building and restoring essential police infrastructure. Repairing and restoring the city's historic forts ranks on the same level as these essential infrastructure items. See the Appendix for a list of priority projects.

Strategies for reducing flood risk to homes and businesses are limited to incentive-based programs, such as programs to elevate homes. A program to help residents relocate from sparsely settled areas to clustered developments appears to be geared solely toward counteracting the so-called "jack-o'-lantern" effect. Rather than requiring clustering in areas with low flood risk, it allows government-financed resettlements to be located in areas at high risk of future flooding. In fact, it appears oriented toward clustering within high-risk areas, a conclusion that the consultants say is not intended. To mitigate risk, the plan is relying on FEMA Base Flood Elevation requirements and voluntary elevation programs.

The program provides nebulous suggestions for allocating resources throughout the city. For instance, it sets forth infrastructure and street repair directives for different planning areas, but the distinctions between the directives are hard to grasp. Furthermore, no maps or boundaries are provided to allow citizens to understand where the planning areas are and how the policies and programs connected to them apply.

## COLLECTING AND USING PUBLIC INPUT

The methodology planners used in preparing the Citywide Plan is never revealed in the document, except in vague generalities. In some cases, the Citywide Plan seems to take a popularity contest approach, with the results of community meetings determining results. In other cases, it cites the results of community meetings to support strategic applications, but on closer examination, there is disharmony. Overall, it is unclear where and how community input, professional judgment or data drove tenets of the plan.

The plan refers to the results of Community Congress

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to support some of its priorities. To be sure, the UNOP planners deserve credit for a tremendous outreach effort. However, the process and its results raise uncertainties.

The value of public input in large-scale forums, such as those conducted in this case by America Speaks, depends on the quality of the information and the questions presented to the public. It also depends on the skill and objectivity with which the results are interpreted. There were problems on both fronts. In some cases, organizers put ambiguous or ungainly questions to the audience. In other cases, consultants misinterpreted participants' sentiments, resulting in otherwise unexplained propositions in the plan.

Organizers sometimes went astray in the way they queried meeting participants. At one Community Congress, organizers asked, "... how important is the availability of housing that is affordable to lower and middle income people?" The question is so broad as to deflect opposition. Organizers also asked "... how important is it to you that your neighborhood keep its previous mix of incomes?" This question is also defective, since it would mean something completely different to someone living in a middle class neighborhood than someone living in a mixed-income neighborhood.

At another Congress, participants were asked to decide whether they wanted infrastructure resources to be concentrated in the "areas of greatest need" without an explanation of what that phrase meant. Is the "greatest need" where more people reside? Is it in areas that were most devastated? The slide presenting the question and the hand-outs conveyed different interpretations of the phrase, one suggesting that the "areas of greatest need" are the devastated ones and the other indicating that they are the most populated areas. Consultants acknowledged to BGR that the last question was problematic and stated that they had disregarded the feedback from it.

The public input is at times misconstrued. For example, the Citywide Plan claims that "the public" has strongly demanded that the City prioritize housing for "renters, low-income families and public housing residents ... Funding is needed to build low- and moderate-income public housing." In a footnote, the reader

finds what meeting participants really wanted: "Creating homeownership opportunities for low-income and public housing residents without concentrating poverty received the most support of affordable housing options." And yet the Citywide Plan assigns homeownership programs far lower priority in the ranking of recovery projects and a small fraction of the hundreds of millions of dollars allocated to low-income subsidized units. The reader also learns in the footnote that support for low-income housing was less unanimous than the reported "strong message" participants sent: "53% of (Community Congress II) participants supported funding for low- and moderate-income housing, with 36% opposed."

The Community Congresses generated some perplexing results. For example, the Citywide Plan says a program to make schools "24/7 community centers received the greatest support from CCII participants in the area of education and health services" while "improving school quality" received second highest priority. In other words, participants considered having schools that are community centers more important than having good schools. This would seem to point to some flaw in the way questions were presented or information was organized.

## A MATTER OF PRINCIPLES

The Citywide Plan sets forth "core principles" and cites other guiding values throughout the document, but it never reveals the source of these principles and values.

The principles include: Every citizen has the "right to return"; the city should be "safer, stronger and smarter"; "equity" should guide decisions; all neighborhoods should come back; and "individual choice" should be emphasized.

The stated focus on equity, later mentioned as one of the main principles guiding its affordable housing program, injects a highly subjective concept. Equity essentially means "fairness," but the plan never explains what this implies. It could mean several things:

- Resources should be distributed equally

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on a geographic basis.

- Resources should be distributed based on the location of the population.
- Resources should be distributed disproportionately to impoverished areas to mitigate the effects of capitalism, socio-economic conditions and history.
- Resources should be distributed to the most damaged areas to put them on an equal footing with less damaged areas.

By failing to state directly what the Citywide Plan means by equity, it fails to communicate a key aspect of what it purports to be about. The plan should clearly explain the concept or eliminate its use.

The plan also invokes the “right to return” of every citizen. It calls this slogan a “core value,” but it is unclear how it qualifies as a value. It can be interpreted to mean that some people are intentionally being prevented from returning by someone or some means; that public housing beneficiaries have a right to the units the government provided before the flood; or that the call among some experts to make dangerous areas of the city off-limits for redevelopment should be rejected. As in the case of equity, the phrase should be eliminated or replaced with a more precise statement of the value.

The Citywide Plan touts its “support for individual choice” as a “financing principle.” Specifically, it states: “Emphasis is placed on supporting individual choice, regardless from (sic) which district a citizen hailed, and regardless of the resettlement area to which an individual might choose to return. Importantly, the financing plan does not pit one neighborhood against another.”

When one reads this statement in the context of the entire plan, the full meaning becomes clear. The Citywide Plan declines to create firm criteria for decision-making. The plan declines to be clear about timelines or priorities. The plan instead chooses to maintain the indecisive and confusing approach that has characterized New Orleans’ recovery for a year and a half.

## A DUBIOUS SCORING SYSTEM

To guide prioritization in its list of recovery projects, the Citywide Plan used a dual scoring system, with each part awarding a maximum of 5 points, for a possible total of 10. First, each project was assigned a “recovery value,” based on a series of factors, including: the relationship of the project to storm-caused damages; community support and demonstrable community-wide benefits; incorporation of best practices for reducing future loss; and symbiosis with other projects. Projects that meet all these criteria were supposed to be assigned a score of 4 or 5. The other half of the scoring, the “area of impact,” assigned projects points based on whether they would be of national, statewide, regional, citywide or district-wide/neighborhood significance. Projects of national significance received a score of 5, of statewide significance, 4, and so on.

The plan does not provide details on whether, and if so, how, the elements within the two general criteria were weighted. The consultants informed BGR that there was no weighting.

The scoring system is flawed. First, it is unclear why a project with national, statewide or regional significance should receive a higher score than one with citywide or neighborhood significance. It is, after all, a “citywide” plan. Second, the criteria are so vague that they fail to rein in subjectivity. Finally, the scoring range is so narrow that large numbers of projects end up with the same score, essentially eliminating prioritization among many projects.

The scoring system fails to match up with general assertions about priorities. At one point in the Summary of Recovery Projects, the plan claims to have devised a framework so that projects “could be phased and prioritized according to damage, rate of repopulation, and future risk of flooding.” This prioritization is indiscernible in the ranking of projects and programs.

The scoring system also fails to yield results consistent with the priorities discussed elsewhere. For example, the Financial Plan states: “The Flood Protection and Neighborhood Stabilization programs are the cornerstones of this Plan. These two initiatives are the foun-

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ation for a viable and sustainable future for our City and its residents and businesses.” Yet the top two projects on the list of priorities are in the categories of affordable housing and health care.

In key cases, the scores do not seem to reflect the Citywide Plan’s own criteria. For example, the plan lists “rehab and rebuild low income housing” as a top priority, assigning it the highest possible score (a 10) for recovery value and area of impact. “Rehab and rebuild low income housing” is shorthand for a program that calls for low-income housing units for all former public residents, and for public housing to be rehabilitated or rebuilt to the highest standards, to incorporate mixed-income housing and potentially mixed uses, and to be of higher density than current HOPE VI policies suggest.

It is difficult to discern the national significance of the project. It is also difficult to discern how it falls into the highest category of recovery projects, which requires “both community support and demonstrable community-wide benefits.” It would appear to fit more comfortably in the lower scoring category for projects that “may benefit some sectors/populations but are neutral for others” and “may even have some opposition.” The notion that controversial housing projects targeted toward one segment of the population have community-wide benefits and no opposition is manifestly disputable. By contrast, arterial street repair projects, to which the entire public clearly has access and which are critical to the City’s recovery, universally receive a lower score of 6 (the lowest score listed is 3) and a low ranking.

Finally, the crudeness of the scoring system results in a ranking system that provides almost no prioritization. Of the 91 items, 17 score between 7 and 10. Forty-five receive a score of 6, meaning that there is no prioritization among half of the projects and programs.

## A LACK OF COHERENCE

The Citywide Plan in some places fails to connect the critical data it contains to the policy remedies the data would seem to require. This is particularly true with respect to flood protection.

## Flood Protection and Safety

The Citywide Plan recognizes that flood protection is the foundation for recovery in New Orleans. It also recognizes that profound challenges are at hand and great expenses are necessary to take on flood protection. The Summary of Recovery Projects announces that, “By taking action ourselves, we are taking more responsibility for our lives, property and public investments, thereby demonstrating the City’s commitment to mitigate its flood risk and justify our request for Category 5 protection.”

A section entitled “Flood Protection” would more accurately be entitled “Flood Proofing,” as that is the thrust of its recommended policies, programs and projects. Other than recommendations to advocate for and study better flood protection, the plan does not include any flood protection projects. It claims that flood control projects, such as levees and coastal restoration, are adequately funded by dedicated sources of revenues. The claim is incorrect, given that adequate plans to protect the entire city have not even been conceived, much less fully funded.

The Citywide Plan speaks to the importance of improving citizen safety and claims to be “rooted in safety and protection.” Yet it never reconciles its *laissez-faire* approach with the fact that, by its own account, certain areas remain, and will remain for decades, highly vulnerable to catastrophic flooding.

In particular, the plan does not deal realistically with the future of eastern New Orleans. It explains in several places that eastern New Orleans and the Lower Ninth Ward will be vulnerable to flooding and storm surge for decades. It states that the levees in eastern New Orleans did not fail but were overtopped, that the eastern perimeter of the metro area has become increasingly vulnerable due to wetlands retreat and subsidence, that lakes Borgne and Pontchartrain provide a double storm surge threat, and that eastern New Orleans will require comprehensive, long-term solutions to protect it.

Having conveyed a profound sense of vulnerability in that area of the City, the plan stops short of prudently addressing it. Under the heading “Implications for

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Planning,” it advises stakeholders to “carefully monitor flood protection proposals and implementation.” Later, it recommends a study of internal flood protection measures for certain eastern New Orleans neighborhoods. To follow such findings with tepid recommendations and underdeveloped remedies is to short-change the safety principle the plan espouses.

If the flood-risk assessment is correct, there are two responsible options: to remove the threat from the people or to gear programs toward removing people from the area of threat. The document doesn’t reconcile the high, long-term flood risk it describes with its call to invest heavily in an unprotected area, albeit in a more clustered pattern.

This contrasts with the strikingly direct language found in the Citywide Plan’s own Baseline Recovery Assessment. It says: “New Orleans cannot afford to rebuild infrastructure in areas of high flood risk, only to have another flood destroy those facilities again. The state and nation would soon lose patience with such a policy. ... All five drainage basins have differing levels of risk. The relative risk should be evaluated for each basin and this information given to the public. As a matter of public policy, investment in physical infrastructure in high risk areas should be avoided, or at least minimized.”

## Infrastructure

The Citywide Plan asserts that renewal of the City’s infrastructure is “critical to the support of basic living conditions and essential economic activity.” This reflects standard thinking on the matter – that infrastructure, from sewer, water and drainage to streets, provides the bones for any successful city. The Citywide Plan points out that resources are limited for infrastructure. It then goes on to assign infrastructure and street projects medium and lower priority on its list of recovery projects.

## HAZY PHASED INVESTMENT

The Citywide Plan purports to set priorities for various areas of the city. It paints the cityscape with broad brushstrokes, passing over the distinctions between

neighborhoods’ flood risk and rate of recovery in favor of broad categories. It is unclear to what areas of New Orleans these categories refer, how the categories relate to the plan’s ranking of recovery projects, or what are the practical implications for investment decisions.

In discussing its “Strategic Planning Framework,” the Citywide Plan recognizes two key considerations for deciding where and when to direct investment: varying rates of repopulation across the City and differing levels of flood risk. It then proceeds without discernibly employing this insight. Rather, it essentially equates flooding risk with a slow rate of return and couples them to create three extremely broad bands for assessing and demarcating levels of recovery: areas with very slow repopulation rates and high risk of future flooding; areas with moderate repopulation rates and moderate risk of future flooding; and areas with fast repopulation rates and low risk of flooding. These categories are ostensibly used to form the basis for phasing investment throughout the City.

Certain areas may face similar flood risks, but will experience vastly different rates of repopulation. Factors driving these differences include: the financial wherewithal of residents, the level of organization among residents, the proximity of the neighborhood to population centers, the condition of infrastructure, homeownership rates, the percentage of raised houses versus slab houses and, among slab houses, the percentage that met FEMA Base Flood Elevation requirements.

The plan never overlays these key factors or provides maps overlaying repopulation rates and high-risk areas. The reader is left in the dark as to which parts of the city fall into the various categories. Ultimately, the omission of this critical piece of information may not matter, since it is not clear how elevation and repopulation play into recovery priorities. It is also unclear how they connect with the plan’s list of ranked recovery projects.

The Citywide Plan states that it “phases recovery projects over time, to ensure that public and private investment in the recovery and rebuilding match the pace of resettlement while also making strategic upgrades in

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infrastructure, public facilities, and public services throughout the City to ensure that we rebuild Safer, Stronger, and Smarter.” Claiming to phase recovery over time to ensure that investment matches the pace of settlement implies that the plan sets forth criteria and mechanisms for determining how to target and when to release investment. It does not accomplish that. It provides only a vague and confusing description of what to expect with respect to infrastructure, and when to expect it, for each of the three types of areas.

## PLANNING IN A FINANCIAL VOID

One of the Citywide Plan’s key faults is its failure to explore recovery scenarios based on realistic levels of financing and to place decisions in that context. Instead of basing priorities on realistic levels of financing, the financing is based loosely on a speculative list of priorities. The end result is a wish list.

The constraints inherent in financial limitations are avoided throughout the plan. There is no attempt to assess the amount of resources that can reasonably be expected from various sources and to devise a plan for optimal deployment of those resources.

This problem finds its ultimate expression in the plan’s “Recovery Scenarios” located in the Citywide Recovery Framework. Rather than providing alternate strategies for utilizing limited resources, the scenarios assume that “similar levels of resources and types of strategies will be applied across the City and across different recovery needs and issues.” Only the funding and outcomes vary.

The first scenario, called *Re-pair*, “relies on the current suite of disaster funding” from public and private sources. Under this scenario population will lag, the tax base will be hobbled, and quality of life and service delivery will suffer. The second scenario, called *Re-habilitate*, anticipates a moderate level of additional funding, with moderate results for population, the economy, the tax base, quality of life and services. The third scenario, called *Re-vision* “is the most optimistic view.” Not too surprisingly, more funding and investment in the City leads to even better results.

Organizers presented scenarios to the participants at a Community Congress and, according to the Citywide Plan, the scenarios “formed the basis for citywide conversations.” The process did not focus on scenarios illustrating the impact of alternate plans based on limited resources. This could have dramatically increased the participants’ grasp of the issues and provided the participants with a better sense of the hard choices New Orleans faces.

Consultants should have presented a cohesive Citywide Plan based on available and reasonably anticipated funding sources. Other long-shot items could have been separately identified.

## OTHER FINANCING ISSUES

The Financial Plan component of the Citywide Plan lacks substance. It consists of a list of possible funding sources, such as particular departments of state and federal government, and a series of national foundations. It makes little attempt to identify particular programs or to quantify local revenue-generating capacity.

The Citywide Plan purports to offer a financing plan that defines funding gaps. It does so based on numbers that it doesn’t explain and without providing adequate information on funding that has already been allocated or committed. It assumes that all projects eligible for FEMA Public Assistance will be funded and therefore does not include them.

The failure to include all projects, regardless of whether there are adequate funding sources, creates confusion and ambiguity in the plan. It is difficult to know whether a project is omitted from the list because it is unimportant or because it is fully funded. For example, the Citywide Plan’s Recovery Assessment states that the Sewerage & Water Board needs \$5.7 billion in capital investment over the next 25 years and needed billions of dollars in repairs even before Katrina. These needs are not reflected in the plan’s cost projections and project priorities. The failure to include figures on available funds makes it impossible to place the list of priorities in perspective or to gauge the relative investment in individual projects.

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## VAGUE IDEAS

The Citywide Plan recommends several programs and policies without adequately fleshing them out.

### Neighborhood Stabilization

One of the highest priorities and most expensive programs the Citywide Plan recommends is a voluntary neighborhood clustering program. The plan states it would cost \$1.05 billion. It's difficult to understand how consultants arrived at that figure, since the plan gives only a very general description of how the billion-dollar program would work. The program would be voluntary with neighborhoods and businesses working collaboratively to plan new communities. The plan doesn't recommend criteria for determining where and how such clusters should be formed. While the clustering program might be an excellent idea, the proposal does not offer adequate detail to judge its potential.

Elsewhere, the plan provides a practical recommendation to redevelop underutilized areas of high ground where there is strong repopulation activity. It claims to "set priorities" for the City Planning Commission and other agencies to facilitate redevelopment of these areas. But such priorities are nowhere to be found in the document. The Project Sheet describing the recommendation offers neither criteria, such as the safety of a given location, nor a map indicating what the redevelopment areas might be. The plan simply recommends small area studies to help execute this recommendation at a future date.

### Affordable Housing

The Citywide Plan speaks of providing "affordable housing for all" as one of its "core programs." It calls for covering relocation costs to meet the needs of all residents. These are bold social promises, not programs, and they are not supported by realistic strategies. They are promises that no city is capable of keeping, especially not post-Katrina New Orleans.

The plan also calls for the implementation of a comprehensive permanent housing strategy for all displaced residents. It sets an impossible standard, then punts the strategy for reaching that standard to yet another planning process.

## INAPPROPRIATE RECOMMENDATIONS

While the Citywide Plan is in places too general to be of utility, it is too detailed in others, resulting in inappropriate recommendations. For example, it calls for HANO to rebuild 5,000 public housing units "of a significantly higher density than current HOPE VI policies to establish a critical mass that will support ... social services and community programs." These fine-grained recommendations are jolting in the broad-brush context of the rest of the document and are not explained or justified.

Certain regulatory recommendations seem to jump the gun. The plan recommends that the City's Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance should be updated to permit "24/7" neighborhood community centers "outright" on school campuses. This detailed recommendation fails to recognize that many schools in New Orleans are located in the centers of residential neighborhoods, particularly in historic areas. While 24/7 community centers might play a significant role in rebuilding communities, the impact of that type of high-intensity use on individual neighborhoods deserves careful consideration.

Also in the zoning arena, the Citywide Plan recommends the City adopt an "inclusionary zoning ordinance" that requires developers to include below-market-rate housing as a percentage of large scale housing developments. Some would argue that a city on its knees cannot afford to tie the hands of developers in such a way while neighboring parishes do not. What would be the impact on condominium development? How would it impact existing neighborhoods? This seems to be a matter for future debate and is out of place as a recommendation here.

Another example of a premature recommendation is the call to replace "Big Charity" through a joint venture between Louisiana State University and the Office of Veteran Affairs. While the issue is presented as an economic development issue, it must also be considered in the context of overhauling Louisiana's health-care delivery system. Would the proposed investment foreclose more systemic changes? These are heady public policy decisions that are still under review.

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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The City needs a blueprint, a plan that makes sense. Unfortunately, the Citywide Plan fails to deliver a cohesive, workable roadmap for recovery. Instead, it proposes a sweeping list of 91 projects, without placing them in a realistic financial context. As for recovery strategy, it offers a continuation of the indecisive and confusing approach that has characterized New Orleans' recovery for a year and a half.

Despite the good intentions behind it, the Citywide Plan suffers from fundamental shortcomings. It is internally inconsistent, and not well-crafted. It does not set priorities or provide realistic timelines. Rather, it embraces abstract, unexplained principles. It employs a vague and bewildering scoring system. It fails to connect findings with policies in some places, and avoids envisioning and ranking projects based on realistic financial constraints. It offers vague programmatic ideas in some places and overly detailed ones in others.

There are two options for moving forward. One is for the City Planning Commission to send the report back to the UNOP consultants to address the analytical and other weaknesses. The other is for the City Planning Commission to take control of the document and process.

BGR is recommending the latter course. This would put the recovery planning process in step with the City Charter, which designates the City Planning Commission as the entity to prepare and recommend to the City Council plans for areas destroyed by disasters.

Specifically, BGR recommends the following:

- The City Planning Commission should create a clear, data-driven and practical recovery plan based on realistic financial considerations. To maintain momentum, the City Planning Commission should incorporate and build on useful data and concepts from the 13 District Plans, the Citywide Plan (particularly the Citywide Baseline Recovery Assessment) and other post-Katrina planning efforts.

- The Mayor's recovery management team should collaborate closely with the City Planning Commission to assist it in preparing the plan.
- After completing the plan, the City Planning Commission should recommend it to the City Council for adoption.
- The City Council should amend the budget to provide the City Planning Commission with supplemental funding, as needed, to complete the plan.
- All funding for future planning efforts, whether from public or private sources, should be directed through the City Planning Commission.

APPENDIX: CITYWIDE PLAN RANKED LIST OF RECOVERY PROJECTS



Ranked List of Recovery Projects

Project #	Sector	Project Name	Recovery Value	Area of Impact	Score	Project Location
19	Economic Recovery	LSU/VA/University Hospital	5	5	10	District 2
14	Housing	Rehab and Rebuild low income housing	5	5	10	Citywide
8	Neighborhood Stability	Neighborhood Cluster Program	5	4	9	Citywide
22	Economic Recovery	Replace Container Handling Capacity - Port of New Orleans	4	4	8	District 1
25	Economic Recovery	Relocation of New Orleans Cold Storage	4	4	8	District 2
1	Flood Protection	"Elevate New Orleans" Incentive Program: Residential and Small Business Owners	5	3	8	Citywide
6	Flood Protection	Slab-on-Grade Remediation Program	5	3	8	Citywide
16	Housing	Transient Worker Housing	5	3	8	Citywide
53	Transportation	Evacuation and Disaster Response Plan	4	4	8	Citywide
18	Economic Recovery	Bio-Innovation Center	4	3	7	District 1
21	Economic Recovery	Cruise Ship Terminal Expansion	4	3	7	District 1
2	Flood Protection	Floodproof Essential Public Equipment	5	2	7	Citywide
58	Health Care	Restore comprehensive medical services to N. O. East	4	3	7	District 9
12	Housing	Singles and Doubles Program: Homebuyer Assistance for Rental Properties	4	3	7	Citywide
90	Implementation	Regulatory Amendments - Zoning and Other Updates	5	2	7	Citywide
91	Implementation	Recovery Staffing Needs	5	2	7	Citywide
77	Recreation and Libraries	Implement Master Plan for City Park	4	3	7	District 5
20	Economic Recovery	Seed and Early Stage Equity Capital Fund	4	2	6	Citywide
23	Economic Recovery	Expansion of Louis Armstrong International Airport	3	3	6	Airport
27	Economic Recovery	Develop Louisiana Cancer Research Center	2	4	6	District 2
29	Economic Recovery	Canal St/Downtown Revitalization	4	2	6	District 1
60	Education	Repair and Renovate Existing School Facilities or Construct New Facilities	4	2	6	Citywide
61	Education	Temporary Modular School Facilities	4	2	6	Citywide
72	Environmental Concerns	Hurricane Recovery Soil Assessment and Remediation Program	4	2	6	Citywide
73	Environmental Concerns	Reinstitute a City recycling program and construct a recycling facility	4	2	6	Citywide
3	Flood Protection	Study: Internal Flood Protection measures for Selected N.O. East Neighborhoods	4	2	6	District 9,10
4	Flood Protection	Study: Hurricane Protection Levee System for Algiers	4	2	6	District 13
5	Flood Protection	Study: Hurricane Protection Levee System for Algiers Lower Coast	4	2	6	District 13
7	Flood Protection	Orleans/Jefferson Levee Study	3	3	6	Districts 1-7
87	Historic Preservation/Urban Design	Develop a Pattern Book of New Orleans Architecture	4	2	6	Districts 1-6
11	Housing	Implement Permanent Housing Development Strategy for All Displaced Residents	4	2	6	Citywide
13	Housing	Home buyer assistance -low & moderate homeowners	4	2	6	Citywide
17	Housing	Neighborhood Recovery Resource Centers	4	2	6	Citywide
31	Infrastructure and Utilities	Algiers Drinking Water Plant--Emergency Fuel Storage & Filter Valve Control System	4	2	6	District 12,13
32	Infrastructure and Utilities	Carrollton Drinking Water Plant--Additional Flocculation and Sedimentation Capacity	4	2	6	District 3
33	Infrastructure and Utilities	Carrollton Drinking Water Plant--Short Term Projects	4	2	6	District 3
34	Infrastructure and Utilities	Drainage Improvements--Short-term Projects	4	2	6	Citywide
35	Infrastructure and Utilities	East Bank Wastewater Treatment Plant--Levee Improvement, Mitigation and Wetlands Project	4	2	6	District 11
36	Infrastructure and Utilities	Power Plant	4	2	6	District 3
37	Infrastructure and Utilities	Sewerage & Water Board--Technical Staff	4	2	6	Citywide
39	Infrastructure and Utilities	Wastewater Collection System--Short Term Improvement	4	2	6	Citywide
41	Infrastructure and Utilities	Water Distribution System--Asset Management Plan and Short Term System Replacement	4	2	6	Citywide
9	Neighborhood Stability	Small Area Adaptive Re-Use Studies	4	2	6	Citywide
10	Neighborhood Stability	Study: Streamline process for purchase of blighted housing and the lot-next-door program	4	2	6	Citywide

Source: UNOP Citywide Plan



### Ranked List of Recovery Projects

Project #	Sector	Project Name	Recovery Value	Area of Impact	Score	Project Location
89	Preservation/Urban Design	Repair and Preserve Historic Forts	1	5	6	Districts 11/5
63	Public Safety	Develop a Citywide Network of State-of-the-Art Police Substations	4	2	6	Citywide
64	Public Safety	Develop and Integrate Crime Lab and Central Evidence and Property Storage Function	4	2	6	Citywide
65	Public Safety	Provide a Citywide Criminal Surveillance System	4	2	6	Citywide
66	Public Safety	Replace or Repair all NOPD Equipment	4	2	6	Citywide
67	Public Safety	Renovate NOPD Headquarters at 715 N.Broad	4	2	6	Citywide
68	Public Safety	Renovation of NOPD Special Operations Unit	4	2	6	Citywide
69	Public Safety	Renovate and/or Repair 7 District Headquarters Buildings	4	2	6	Citywide
70	Public Safety	Emergency Communications Center	4	2	6	Citywide
74	Recreation and Libraries	Renovate Main Library - Phases I and II	4	2	6	District 1
75	Recreation and Libraries	Repair, renovate or construct new regional libraries	4	2	6	District 9 and 12
80	Recreation and Libraries	Renovate public marinas	3	3	6	Districts 5,9
43	Transportation	Repair/Restoration of High Priority Major Arterial Roads	4	2	6	Districts 1,3,4,5,6,7,9,12
44	Transportation	Repair/Restoration of High Priority Minor Arterial Roads	4	2	6	Districts 1,3,4,5,6,7,9,12
45	Transportation	Repair/Restoration of High Priority Collector Roads	4	2	6	Districts 1,3,4,6,12
46	Transportation	Repair/Restoration of High Priority Local Roads	4	2	6	Districts 2,3,5,12
47	Transportation	Ongoing Replacement of all Major and Minor City Streets	4	2	6	Citywide
49	Transportation	East-West Corridor/downtown Loop	3	3	6	District 1 Terminus
24	Economic Recovery	Commercial corridor revitalization program	3	2	5	Citywide
26	Economic Recovery	Small Business Incubator and Assistance Program	3	2	5	Citywide
28	Economic Recovery	Neighborhood Workforce Training Program	3	2	5	Citywide
30	Economic Recovery	Evaluation and Potential Adaptive Reuse of Publicly Owned Property	3	2	5	Citywide
59	Education	Neighborhood Community Centers	3	2	5	Citywide
62	Education	Study: Rehabilitate Louisiana Technical College and Evaluate Need for Additional Facilities	2	3	5	District 7
71	Environmental Concerns	Sustainable Environmental Strategies	3	2	5	Citywide
57	Health Care	Redevelopment of Neighborhood-Based Health Centers/Clinics	3	2	5	Districts 2,3,4,8
85	Historic Preservation/Urban Design	Katrina Memorial	3	2	5	TBD
86	Historic Preservation/Urban Design	Historic Preservation Technical and Financial Assistance Program	3	2	5	Citywide
15	Housing	Home Rehabilitation for low and moderate income homeowners	3	2	5	Citywide
38	Infrastructure and Utilities	Wastewater Collection System--Medium Term Improvement	3	2	5	Citywide
40	Infrastructure and Utilities	Water Distribution System-Medium Term System Replacement Program and High Lift Facility	3	2	5	Citywide
76	Recreation and Libraries	Repair, renovate or construct new neighborhood libraries	3	2	5	Districts 3,4,5,6
78	Recreation and Libraries	Repair, Renovate, or Construct New Regional Parks	2	3	5	Districts 9,10,11,12
51	Transportation	Implementation of Citywide Bike Path System	3	2	5	Citywide
52	Transportation	Study Feasibility of Expanding Streetcar and Light Rail Routes	3	2	5	Citywide
83	Other Municipal and Cultural Resources	Create a Downtown Theater District	1	3	4	District 1
84	Other Municipal and Cultural Resources	Invest in Cultural Recovery Programs	1	3	4	Citywide
88	Historic Preservation/Urban Design	Sidewalk, Streetscape, and Neutral Ground Improvements	2	2	4	Citywide
56	Transportation	Traffic and Parking Management Studies	2	2	4	Citywide
82	Other Municipal and Cultural Resources	Expansion of Existing Arts District	1	2	3	District 2
42	Infrastructure and Utilities	Citywide Wireless Network	1	2	3	Citywide
79	Recreation and Libraries	Repair, Renovate, or Construct New District/Neighborhood Parks	1	2	3	Citywide
81	Recreation and Libraries	Create new parks and green belts, as needed	1	2	3	Citywide
48	Transportation	Streetcar Travel Time Improvement Study	1	2	3	Districts 1,2,3
50	Transportation	Extension of Riverfront Streetcar Line	2	1	3	District 1,2,6,7
54	Transportation	Study of the Removal of I-10 between Hwy. 90 and Elysian Fields Ave.	1	2	3	Districts 1 and 4
55	Transportation	Study Installation of Soundwalls along I-10 and I-610	1	2	3	Citywide

Source: UNOP Citywide Plan

# NOT READY FOR PRIME TIME

An Analysis of  
the UNOP Citywide Plan



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