

Building Local Capacity: Planning for Local Culture and Neighborhood Recovery in New Orleans

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Abstract

How can successful partnerships for advocacy planning be formed and sustained in a postdisaster environment? What roles can university-community partnerships play to create a more equitable and sustainable city while retaining the qualities of local culture that make New Orleans distinct? This article describes an innovative partnership between The Urban Conservancy and the Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design at the University of Missouri-Kansas City that is focused on local culture as the foundation for disaster recovery and economic renewal. Cultural heritage offers an alternative framework for recovery planning that prioritizes local culture and the historic built environment as essential to the city's identity and recovery. Successful partnerships in a city like New Orleans require local knowledge, respect for local culture, and an understanding of local politics. In this context, a partnership informed by mutual respect with a goal of local capacity building was a useful approach to the university-community partnerships model.

Introduction

Among cities in the United States, New Orleans is one of the most distinctive places with a deep history of urbanism and cultural diversity. When viewed in the context of suburbanization and homogenization in the post-World War II era, the distinctiveness of the city's *creole urbanism* is even more pronounced (Wagner, 2008; Hirsch and Logsdon, 1992). While the historic character

of the city's neighborhoods provides the basic framework for everyday life, it also serves as the foundation for the tourism industry, one of the dominant sectors of the New Orleans economy (Whelan, 2006). In the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the levee failures, however, much of the historic urban fabric and the city's cultural heritage are threatened.

Although Hurricane Katrina and the failure of the federal hurricane protection system created a housing crisis of epic proportions, rebuilding has required more than rehabilitating the city's housing stock. Because of the sheer size of the area impacted by floodwaters and the preexisting conditions in the city's neighborhoods, recovery planning has required a multidimensional focus on local culture, infrastructure planning, and community economic development.

This article describes an innovative approach to community planning and design in New Orleans focused on local culture as the foundation for disaster recovery and economic renewal. Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Office of University Partnerships (OUP), the project involves an ongoing partnership between The Urban Conservancy in New Orleans and the Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design, at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC). Additional partners include the Friends of Lafitte Corridor (FOLC), the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization (MCNO), the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, and The University of New Orleans.

The research addresses two questions: (1) How can successful partnerships for advocacy planning be formed and sustained given the challenges of working in a postdisaster environment? (2) What is the role of university-community partnerships in rebuilding a more equitable and sustainable city that retains the qualities of local culture that make New Orleans distinct? This article presents the partnership's efforts in the areas of economic development, heritage tourism, and planning for neighborhood recovery. It evaluates the context in which the university-community partnership developed and the challenges the partners faced in their efforts to advocate for a sustainable and equitable recovery process.

Context

Following the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, the city of New Orleans was in a dire situation. According to data compiled by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Small Business Administration (SBA), more than 105,000 housing units in Orleans Parish experienced major or severe flood damage. This number alone is staggering—Orleans Parish experienced more damaged housing units from the disaster than the states of Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, and Florida combined (HUD, 2006). Impacts to businesses were also severe in Orleans Parish. State reports show that Orleans Parish lost 2,564 employers in the first year following the disaster—the highest total loss in the state (Terrell and Bilbo, 2007). The Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism reported that the tourism industry in New Orleans was losing upwards of \$15 million per day in revenues from lost tourism and hospitality activity following the disaster (Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, 2005a).

In addition to these impacts and the disaster's broad geographic scope, the mass evacuation caused by the disaster created a financial crisis that left local government paralyzed and near bankruptcy. Although both Mayor C. Ray Nagin and Governor Kathleen Blanco acted quickly to establish

rebuilding commissions, the city government had limited capacity to rebuild. Mayor Nagin's decision to lay off an estimated 3,000 "nonessential" employees in October 2005, including two-thirds of the city's planning staff, had a serious effect on the ability of the city's planning and housing agencies to function (Eggler, 2005).

In New Orleans, the recovery process included three phases of planning led by different organizations, including the Action Plan to Rebuild New Orleans, prepared by Wallace, Roberts & Todd, LLC Planning and Design for the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC); the New Orleans Neighborhoods Rebuilding Plan (NONRP), prepared by consultant teams under the contract of Lambert Advisory for the City Council; and the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) developed by multiple planning consultants under the direction of the Greater New Orleans Foundation with substantial funding and support from the Rockefeller Foundation. Each plan served a specific purpose and dealt with the challenge of citywide recovery in different ways, given the tensions inherent in postdisaster planning that was highly politicized (Wagner, 2006; Nelson, Ehrenfeucht, and Laska, 2007).

By January 2006, the policy direction from City Hall suggested an approach in which each neighborhood would have to prove its viability (Russell and Donze, 2006). In this context, many neighborhood organizations struggled to get their recovery planning process going with little or no input from the city planning staff. Local nonprofit organizations also struggled to recover from the disaster and to rebuild their operations. Given this environment, many universities began to partner with local nonprofits and neighborhood organizations to develop plans that would demonstrate a neighborhood's ability to rebuild.

University-Community Partnerships Literature

Before the disastrous events of August 29, 2005, the university-community partnership approach at HUD's OUP had demonstrated 10 years of encouraging universities to participate in service learning. These university collaborations with local organizations included applied research in the areas of public education, community development, urban planning, and architecture/community design (Baum, 2003; Feld, 1997; Pearson and Robbins, 2002).

The universities that OUP selected for the Gulf Coast Universities Rebuilding America Partnerships grants in March 2006 represented a mix of these areas of partnership. Our work falls under the heading of community design, because the actual practice has been a mix of neighborhood advocacy planning, local economic development, heritage tourism planning, and urban (greenway) design. Community design is increasingly recognized as a practice with the potential to create more sustainable design solutions that are the product of local knowledge and professional expertise (Blake, 2003; Hester, 1984; 2006).

Insights From the Disaster Recovery Literature

The relationship among urban planning, urban design, and disasters has long been a focus of scholarly research. Kevin Lynch's work *What Time Is This Place?* (1972) provides a landmark exploration of the questions surrounding environmental change in cities. Lynch argues that the purpose of urban planning is fundamentally related to the management of change. Rather than

suggesting that the disaster created a “clean slate” in New Orleans, Lynch’s work affirms the reality that planning in the context of a postdisaster environment is a far more complex task of managing environmental change in a historic city (Wagner, 2008).

Haas, Kates, and Bowden (1977) provide a four-stage model to describe the basic phases of the disaster recovery process: (1) emergency response (search and rescue operations), (2) restoration (reopening basic services and rebuilding infrastructure), (3) reconstruction I (return to predisaster economy and population), and (4) reconstruction II (memorialize the losses and build for the future). According to these authors, each phase of the process takes about 10 times longer than the previous phase, and the extent of local planning along with government capacity affects the timing of recovery in a particular place (Burke and Beatley, 1997; Vale and Campanella, 2005). Our partnership, which developed near the end of the emergency response phase (November to December 2005) and very early in the restoration phase, was informed by the long-term planning necessary to move the city toward reconstruction. Such planning must recognize that disasters both magnify preexisting social problems and inequities, and create dynamic new situations (Drabek, 1986; Laska and Morrow, 2006; Deyle et al., 1998).

Because our partnership was developed with a holistic view of neighborhood recovery, our team emphasized local business assistance as a key part of the recovery process. Disaster recovery greatly changes the local business environment, and these changes occur at the metropolitan and neighborhood levels. Some local businesses adapt to new conditions and thrive, while others survive the immediate disaster only to fail at surviving the recovery process (Alesch et al., 2001). Given this knowledge of the challenges of disaster recovery and the importance of local business to the city’s economy and culture, our team included a strong business recovery component in its research and planning, including the Stay Local! program and a business recovery workshop (described below).

Building the Partnership

The collaboration began in November 2005 with coordination for an urban planning studio course in the Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design at UMKC in the spring semester of 2006. The leadership of The Urban Conservancy and faculty at UMKC developed a strategy that would meet the needs of the local organization while addressing the educational objectives of a studio-based, urban planning program. The partnership was based on the preexisting professional networks of Dr. Jacob A. Wagner, who had lived and worked in New Orleans from 1999 to 2004. These contacts included Ed Melendez, a founder of The Urban Conservancy. Wagner’s and Melendez’s common values and attitudes toward the economy and culture of New Orleans provided a basis for the collaboration. From the beginning, the team took the approach that the student work would be pragmatic by generating real projects and solutions that the local partner could implement in collaboration with other organizations.

Faculty traveled to New Orleans in December 2005 to meet with The Urban Conservancy and to tour the city’s neighborhoods. Our approach acknowledged that New Orleans would continue to depend on tourism as a significant driver of the local economy and that the urban fabric of the city’s historic neighborhoods was not only worthy of restoration but a necessity for the recovery of local culture and commerce. As such, our planning process sought new strategies to diversify the

city's economy while seeking to more evenly distribute the economic benefits of tourism through a heritage tourism strategy.

Before the disaster, The Urban Conservancy could be characterized as a “next generation” preservation group—one that defines preservation as including both the people in a neighborhood as the generators of local culture and the distinctive built environment. Through their activism and programs, The Urban Conservancy defined this approach to preservation at an urban scale rather than an architectural scale (Melendez and Coats, 2004). Pre-Hurricane Katrina, The Urban Conservancy's role in New Orleans had been to spark dialogue about local economic development and to ask the question: How do you achieve sustainability in a very practical sense within New Orleans' neighborhoods? The organization realized that sustainable development requires moving the community to address issues such as poverty, affordable housing, and other key concerns.

This interrelationship between local culture and historic neighborhoods became heightened as the extent of damage in New Orleans was assessed and the long work of disaster recovery began (Piazza, 2005). UMKC faculty had expertise in neighborhood planning, community development, historic preservation, and regional economic planning. Consultants with expertise in disaster planning and transportation planning were added to the partnership. The four objectives of the university-community partnership included the following:

1. Rebuild the local capacity of citizens, business owners, and community leaders to plan for and implement economic recovery and housing resettlement.
2. Identify heritage tourism nodes in the city and plan for their long-term recovery.
3. Create a plan to attract funding for redevelopment.
4. Develop policy recommendations that will inform the reconstruction process while maintaining the distinct culture of New Orleans.

The original work program proposed a series of plans for three heritage tourism nodes as well as additional tasks to be performed by the university and local partner, including the launch of Stay Local!—an advocacy program for strengthening the local economy.

Why Heritage Tourism?

Cultural heritage offers a different lens for viewing land use and planning decisions that prioritizes local culture and the historic built environment as intrinsically important and essential to the city's identity and recovery (Hayden, 1995). Heritage tourism recognizes the diversity of people who travel to the city and builds on the city's unique neighborhoods, landmarks, and cultural sites to attract visitors. The historic neighborhoods of New Orleans provide diverse attractions for locals and visitors alike, and yet most visitors rarely venture beyond the “tourist bubble” of the French Quarter and Garden District (Judd and Fainstein, 1999).

In the past, the city and the private sector have promoted tourism in New Orleans without much coordination with land use planning or neighborhood participation, despite the fact that such coordination could significantly affect neighborhoods that experience an increase in tourism development (Foley and Lauria, 2003). Vesey's work (1997) shows how local businesses shift over

time to address the tourism market while resident-oriented businesses decline. A new strategy of heritage tourism requires a more deliberate approach to tourism planning that combines distinct local goods and services with public infrastructure investment. The reestablishment of the Canal Streetcar line in 2004, for example, indicates a commitment to tourism as an economic development strategy that should be coordinated with land use planning in the neighborhoods along the streetcar line.

Given the impact of the disaster on the city's historic neighborhoods, our team believed that heritage tourism provides an approach to place-based economic development that is compatible with the unique qualities of local culture. New Orleans includes 22 historic districts of national and local significance, and hundreds of landmarks that define the city's sense of place. Potential attractions are spread throughout the city, although many sites of significance are unknown and often remain unrecognized as opportunities for tourism. Further, in light of the disaster, the team believed that the continuity of the city's historic neighborhoods would be more important than ever because the familiar landmarks and urban fabric provide a counterbalance to the great physical destruction that occurred in the city.

Initial Studio and Planning Research

In January 2006, UMKC began an urban planning studio focused on developing a plan for neighborhood recovery that emphasized heritage tourism. Studio faculty decided that students needed to have an intimate understanding of the city's history for the process to be successful. The work of the studio was organized in three phases. After each of the first two phases, students presented to an interdisciplinary steering committee of Kansas City residents with experience in New Orleans. Having a repository of local knowledge about New Orleans in the steering committee was necessary to direct the plans and designs of relatively inexperienced students.

In phase one, students were assigned readings on New Orleans to begin the process of learning the complexities of the historic city and to prepare for their first trip to the city at the end of January 2006. Students read and critiqued three recovery plans generated for New Orleans immediately after Hurricane Katrina.¹ Using a Geographic Information System (GIS), students mapped historic districts, neighborhood services, and institutions using data from the city's Land Use Plan (New Orleans City Planning Commission, 1999), neighborhood plans (Brooks and Wagner, 1999; Dufour and Gladstone, 2004; Lauria et al., 1996), architectural histories of the city, and local phone and tourist directories.

From these sources, the team identified *heritage tourism nodes*—areas with clusters of historic resources, places of interest, and local businesses. Historic district boundaries were overlaid with these clusters, and 11 nodes were selected for analysis. The identified heritage tourism nodes (exhibit 1) were Oak Street/Carrollton, Freret, OC Haley, Back O' Town, Mid-City, Fair Grounds/Jazz Fest/Bayou St. John, Tremé, St. Roch/New Marigny, Algier's Point, Holy Cross, and Gentilly.

¹ See Urban Land Institute (2005), American Planning Association (2005), BNOB Commission (2006), and Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism (2005a).

An additional linear element—the Lafitte Corridor—was identified for greenway development following a rail corridor and canal that once served as the city’s connection to the Gulf of Mexico. Students presented their initial findings from their first research trip to the steering committee in February 2006. After this meeting, the team selected Tremé and Mid-City for their proximity to the Lafitte Corridor, which provided a direct connection between the two heritage areas (see the section about the Lafitte Greenway).

Phase two consisted of data collection and analysis, and the development of preliminary plans and designs for the three nodes: Tremé, Mid-City, and the Lafitte Corridor. The second study trip occurred in early March 2006. Students and faculty met with MCNO, local planners, and residents. Students walked each node to document open and closed businesses, inventory current land uses and infrastructure conditions, and record the extent of flood damage. Students reported back to the steering committee in late March 2006. The Tremé neighborhood was presented as one heritage tourism area, while Mid-City was separated into four sub-areas due to its size.

Exhibit 1

Map of Heritage Tourism Nodes in New Orleans as Identified by UMKC With The Urban Conservancy, March 2006



UMKC = University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Heritage tourism nodes: (1) Oak Street/Carrollton, (2) Freret, (3) OC Haley, (4) Back O' Town, (5) Mid-City, (6) Fair Grounds/Jazz Fest/Bayou St. John, (7) Tremé, (8) St. Roch/New Marigny, (9) Algier's Point, (10) Holy Cross, and (11) Gentilly.

Phase three of the studio consisted of using the steering committee's comments to produce final plans and designs for the local partner and other project stakeholders in New Orleans. In May 2006, our team made two public presentations, including all of the research and data that the team developed, with planning, design, and policy recommendations that set the stage for future collaboration with The Urban Conservancy and additional partners.

Rebuilding Local Capacity and Moving Into Plan Implementation

After completing the urban planning studio in May 2006, faculty collaboration with local organizations continued. Moving beyond the identification of heritage tourism nodes across the city, the team focused their implementation efforts on the following components:

1. Collaborating with The Urban Conservancy on local business recovery, including the Stay Local! program and other projects that would help advocate for local economic development.
2. Completing a heritage tourism plan for Mid-City and working with the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization to support recovery planning efforts in one of the city's most devastated neighborhoods.
3. Working with the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and FOLC to plan and implement the Lafitte Greenway.

University Collaboration With Local Partner: The Urban Conservancy

Disasters affect organizations as well as residents and the built environment. The Urban Conservancy lost records and board members dispersed as a result of the flood. In New Orleans, university faculty met with the board and new staff of The Urban Conservancy to strengthen the Stay Local! program and implement the heritage tourism plans. During this period, contact between the university and the organization occurred almost daily.

Given the mission of the local partner, the interests of the organizations' new director, and conditions on the ground, local business recovery became the primary focus of the collaboration following the completion of the studio. While faculty continued to develop strategies to rebuild the city's tourism economy, neighborhoods and residents required basic services. The return of local businesses across the city was an essential component of citywide recovery.

Stay Local! Organizes Local Businesses

Before the disaster occurred, the local partner had developed a new program—Stay Local!—to identify and map local businesses; create an online database of locally owned firms; and advocate for a sustainable local economy. In the postdisaster context, the need for this type of local business network was even greater, as the organization identified a need for collaborative marketing strategies in support of local business recovery and to raise awareness about the importance of buying locally to rebuild the city's economy.

Given the lack of reliable information about the city's recovery, the partnership also recognized the importance of providing visual evidence of business recovery at the neighborhood level. Further, due to the disruption of social networks, the organization developed an online approach to col-

laborative marketing and local economic development. Launched in August 2006—on the first anniversary of the disaster—the Stay Local! program provides a venue for communication about neighborhood business recovery, the importance of spending at local businesses, and a visual mapping of the recovery process from the perspective of neighborhood businesses. This approach combined the need for marketing to returning residents with an outreach strategy to attract visitors to local commercial corridors.

Stay Local! also developed a print version of the neighborhood maps that displayed the locations of local businesses as well as historic and cultural attractions. These maps raised awareness of open businesses, provided a forum for organizing local firms, and displayed the heritage resources of the neighborhood. The first neighborhood map was developed for Mid-City—an area selected in the earlier studio work as a high-priority heritage tourism area. Following the success of this initial map, the Stay Local! program has continued to grow to more than 1,400 businesses and neighborhood guides have been produced for several commercial corridors across the city, including the Vietnamese business district in New Orleans East, Freret Street, Old Algiers, and Carrollton/Oak Street (Stay Local!, 2008).

The Stay Local! program has enabled the team to reach out to local businesses across the city, develop new partnerships, and develop a working relationship with community leaders. By providing a real deliverable that visualizes a citywide economic network of locally owned businesses, the organization has been able to build awareness of its mission.

Business Recovery Workshop: Stabilize, Sustain, and Grow

Following the launch of Stay Local! and the neighborhood map guide project, the local partner and the university shifted their attention to planning for a business recovery workshop. Recognizing the need for a coordinated effort to organize local businesses, the team held a 2-day workshop in January 2007 to provide a venue for sharing information, strategizing, and developing new methods of problem solving. This workshop involved presentations by a hazards planning specialist and a representative from the Institute for Business and Home Safety as well as a mobile tour of three neighborhood commercial districts (Oak Street, Mid-City, and Bayou Road). The findings are available at The Urban Conservancy's website (Wagner and Eness, 2007).

University Collaboration With Local Communities

The hallmark of the university-community partnerships model is a collaborative approach in which citizens and community organizations are engaged with faculty and students as part of an ongoing process of action research (Prins, 2005). While UMKC faculty remained engaged with The Urban Conservancy as a primary partner, it also developed other relationships with MCNO and FOLC. This section describes these partnerships and the results that have been achieved.

Recovery Planning in Mid-City

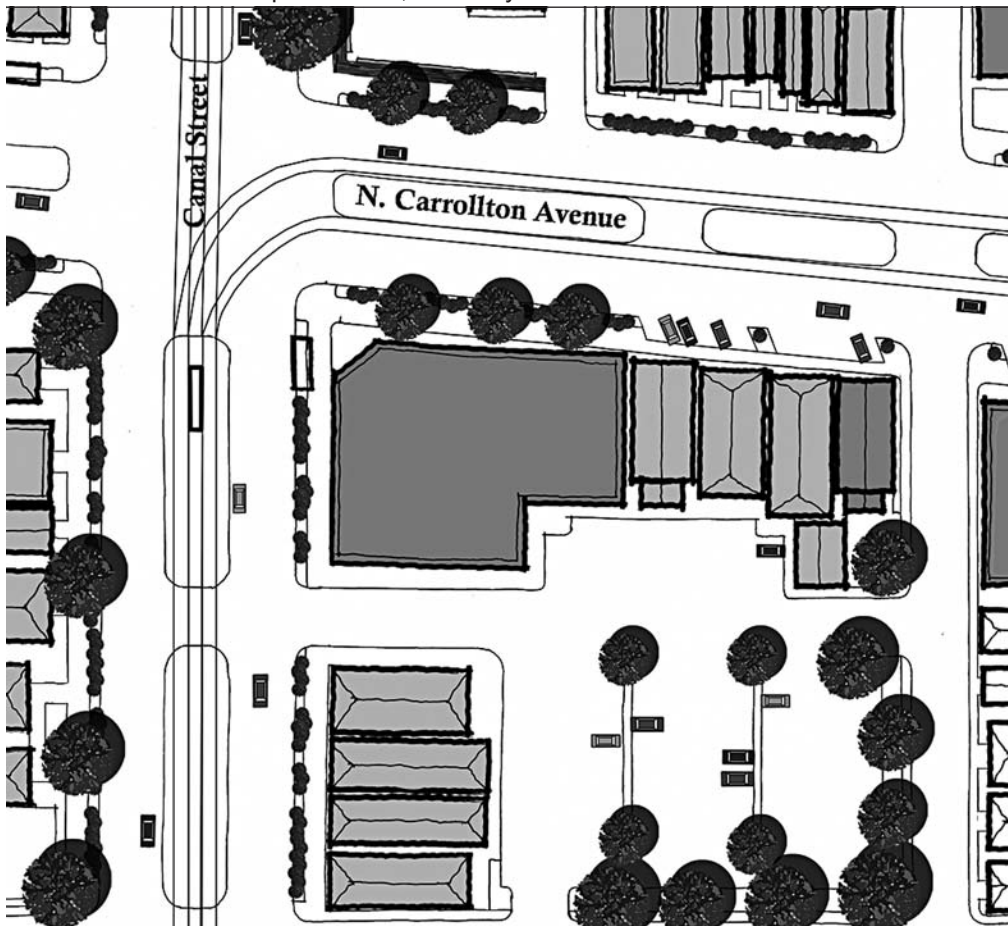
Given the uncertainty about recovery and the contested planning processes, citizens throughout New Orleans' neighborhoods mobilized to produce their own plans (Fields, 2006; Wagner, 2006). Partnerships between these neighborhoods and university planners often fostered an advocacy planning approach informed by a pluralism and multiplicity of competing plans (Davidoff, 1965).

One such neighborhood organization that developed a recovery plan was MCNO, which experienced substantial flood damage.

During the urban planning studio, the team identified MCNO as an additional partner open to working with students and faculty on a recovery plan focused around heritage tourism. Prestorm conditions in Mid-City made this strategy a good fit for the area—especially the reestablishment of the Canal streetcar, which provided a direct connection with the French Quarter and influenced the development of a cluster of new restaurants around existing culinary landmarks. The team recognized these conditions and several large sites for redevelopment as an opportunity to reestablish a commercial district at the scale of New Orleans urbanism. Given the substantial public investment in the Canal Streetcar line, the team advocated for an approach that would build on the transit-oriented development opportunities of the streetcar to replace the automobile-oriented development on North Carrollton Avenue in Mid-City (exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2

Plan View of Redevelopment Site, Mid-City



Student Site Plan, corner of North Carrollton Avenue and Canal Street in Mid-City Plan, depicts the transformation of a vacant, automobile-oriented commercial development into a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development to build on the substantial public investment in the Canal Streetcar in Mid-City.

A heritage tourism plan for Mid-City was published in June 2006. It provides MCNO with a strategy for tourism development in the neighborhood (Wagner et al., 2006). Following the completion of this document, university faculty continued to provide technical support to MCNO over the course of 2006 and 2007. This support included a peer review of the *New Orleans Neighborhoods Rebuilding Plan* for Planning District 4, survey design and analysis for a large retail development proposed in the neighborhood, and planning for the Lafitte Greenway.

Implementing Sustainable Urbanism: The Lafitte Greenway

One of the most successful outcomes facilitated through the partnership has been the institutionalization of a vision for neighborhood revitalization centered on the Lafitte Greenway. The basic concept of the Lafitte Greenway is to build a new public amenity in the form of a 3-mile, linear open space centered on a multiuse trail along the old rail and canal right-of-way known as the Lafitte Corridor. This new amenity would replace the abandoned space that formed a barrier through the heart of Mid-City. According to the work of Alan Berger (2006), this type of space could be viewed as a *drosscape*, a waste landscape created as a byproduct of political economic processes. The Lafitte Corridor was created by multiple phases of industrial capitalism related to port and rail modes of transit and proximity of location to the city's downtown core (both the French Quarter and the central business district). Earlier versions of this concept can be found in multiple city plans, including the 1999 New Orleans Land Use Plan (New Orleans City Planning Commission, 1999), the 2002 New Century New Orleans Master Plan (New Orleans City Planning Commission, 2002), and the Action Plan for New Orleans (BNOB Commission, 2006).

The purpose of creating a new public space in this corridor is to create a strategy for sustainable neighborhood revitalization. The strategy of trail-oriented development seeks to combine the nonmotorized transportation benefits of a trail with the revitalization potential of well-designed and managed urban parks to create a more livable city (Fields, 2006). The benefits of the greenway include enhancing the transportation options of low-income residents in adjacent neighborhoods, increasing safe access to public recreation and schools, developing a new framework for heritage tourism, and revitalizing local business. Trail-oriented development seeks to combine the amenity value of mixed-use development and the increased property value associated with well-designed open spaces and trails to create economically and environmentally sustainable neighborhoods (Crompton, 2001).

In New Orleans, the Lafitte Greenway proposal (exhibit 3) attracted a core group of area residents committed to sustainable recovery principles. Following the public presentation of the studio project in May 2006, local neighborhood advocates began to coalesce around the development of the greenway. The momentum produced by this process of collaboration helped institutionalize the greenway vision in the numerous planning processes. By the spring of 2006, local advocates were successful in getting the project listed as part of the New Orleans Neighborhoods Rebuilding Plan. During the summer of 2006, as the Unified New Orleans Plan was getting under way, a newly formed advocacy group, FOLC, was able to place the greenway development as a central element of the District Four plan.

The collaborative approach of the university faculty with local planners, guided by the passion of local leaders and citizen planners, has provided a platform for successful institutionalization of the

Exhibit 3

Lafitte Greenway Proposal: Trail Generator's Map



Student analysis of the large land use and activity centers that can generate use of the Lafitte Greenway in Mid-City and Tremé.

greenway project. University faculty and professional partners provided technical assistance, such as GIS mapping, demographic analysis, and grant writing, to support FOLC. Student work from the studio provided visual materials and maps that were adapted for outreach and advocacy efforts for both print and web-based publications (see <http://www.folc-nola.org/>). The success of this strategy has been carried through various stages of the project—including advocacy to ensure that the Lafitte Greenway would be included in each recovery plan. The partnership and FOLC made several grant applications totaling more than \$400,000 in additional funding for planning, design development, or construction.²

The initial success at acquiring grant funds helped leverage additional momentum and resources for the project. In March 2007, Mayor Nagin, Dr. Ed Blakely, and the Office of Recovery Management announced that the Lafitte Greenway at Broad Street in Tremé was designated as one of 17 high-priority recovery areas (*The Times-Picayune*, 2007). This designation provided additional momentum as the team continued to develop a master plan for the greenway. In early 2007, the team received a \$10,000 grant from the Bikes Belong Coalition to complete a master plan document that would lead to implementation.

The local leadership of citizens and professionals with the support of university planners and national advocacy organizations was critical in the process of moving this project along at a rapid pace. The team has worked directly with the staff of the Office of Recovery Management and the City Council to develop legislation to implement the project. In August 2007, the team achieved a major milestone with the adoption of legislation by the City Council of New Orleans that provides a structure for implementation. Following a presentation by FOLC and Dr. Wagner, the City Council voted unanimously to approve an ordinance establishing the greenway and a task force to

² Dedicated funds include a planning grant from Bikes Belong and funds for design development, engineering, and construction from Transportation Enhancements and the Recreation and Trails program.

implement the design and construction of the trail. In January 2008, the team published a vision plan to set the stage for greenway development (FOLC and Brown+Danos, 2007).

Evaluation: Thoughts on Rebuilding Local Capacity

Partnerships require a sharing of resources and an exchange of knowledge (Gilderbloom and Mullins, 2005). Through this partnership, the university trained students in disaster recovery planning, historic preservation, and neighborhood planning. Students gained experience working on local planning issues of national importance. After the project, the faculty continued to work with The Urban Conservancy to implement several projects identified in the students' work and to raise additional funds for implementation.

The community also gained in this partnership. Transition funding enabled The Urban Conservancy to retool and rebuild organizational capacity in the postdisaster environment. The organization hired a full-time director and successfully refocused its work within the context of disaster recovery and reconstruction. University investigators, the Rails-to-Trails partner, and The Urban Conservancy all assisted in developing a new advocacy group, FOLC, and raised grants, completed a vision plan, and worked to implement the Lafitte Greenway.

The work of the partnership helped institutionalize the community-based projects into the citywide, official planning processes. The partnership provided technical assistance to the Mid-City Neighborhood Organization. This assistance has come from The Urban Conservancy and the university faculty. Dana Eness of The Urban Conservancy and Dr. Wagner assisted in the successful application of two of the designated Urban Main Street projects that support local business districts. The Urban Conservancy continues its local business promotion strategy that builds on the heritage tourism model. Through the success of the Stay Local! program, The Urban Conservancy has been recognized as a valuable contributor to the city's economic recovery and was recognized by *CityBusiness* as "Innovator of the Year" in 2007.

In some ways, the real test of the partnership is how well plans get implemented (Knudsen, 1988). Relationships between UMKC, The Urban Conservancy, FOLC, and other partners have led to raising funds for plan implementation. New Orleans is a resource-starved city. Our success in garnering funds for implementation speaks to our desire to implement recovery and improvement of the city. This vision came about because of a commitment by the university faculty, The Urban Conservancy, and other partners to move beyond making plans to implementing plans and doing so in an engaged manner.

Several university and professional partners had planning experience in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina, which gave them credibility on the ground during contentious and competing planning processes. Other university investigators built on their own relationships with individuals and groups in the city, which led to the development of trust. By providing support and assistance to more than one local organization, the partnership increased the probability of plan implementation. The plan's ideas and projects have become part of the priorities of multiple parties in the contentious planning environment of post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned for University-Community Partnerships

Disasters require the ability to invent appropriate responses and then follow through with additional collaboration, problem solving, and outreach. History matters—the disaster did not create a “clean slate” (Wagner 2008). Requiring the students to read predisaster plans, such as the *New Orleans Land Use Plan* and neighborhood plans, was critical. Without knowledge of predisaster conditions, teams are likely to fail in their efforts. Successful partnerships in a city like New Orleans require local knowledge, respect for local culture, and an understanding of the city’s recent political history.

Relationship building and capacity building are critical (Glickman and Servon, 1998). UMKC’s approach has been to encourage the local residents to lead while the university provides technical and professional support. As the planning theory literature suggests, trust is critical, especially in the context of distrust created by the failed response to the disaster (Kumar and Paddison, 2000). Commitment, flexibility, and persistence—sticking with it and going beyond a predetermined scope of work—help to sustain trust and foster new partnerships. The university is not alone in setting the direction of the partnership or the content of the planning work. Instead, the direction and focus are informed by shared decisionmaking, and the professional team organized by the university acts as a technical and political advisor to the citizen-based groups.

This work has shown that university-community partnerships can be especially helpful in a disaster-recovery environment. The partnership has led to increased local capacity to support local businesses, advocate for neighborhoods, and transform unused land into an urban amenity for neighborhood revitalization. The agenda must come from local consultation and must reflect and react to the history of local planning practice in the neighborhoods and communities where the partnership is working. Partnerships need to build in the flexibility to work with multiple organizations or to create new organizations when necessary. Although the Urban Conservancy directly benefited, it also served as a community planning and recovery intermediary by providing support and services directly to individual businesses, neighborhood groups, and new nonprofit organizations (Frisch and Servon, 2006).

Positive and negative aspects exist when a nonlocal university provides support. One negative is that university faculty are removed from the harsh, everyday realities of disaster recovery. Frequent trips to the city were necessary to maintain faculty awareness and attention to the changing politics of a city in the recovery and reconstruction phases. Yet, the distance gives the university faculty the advantage of leveraging nonlocal resources and capacity that are not overwhelmed by the disaster. Local universities, planning and design experts, and nonprofit organizations in New Orleans were engaged in their own personal recovery from the disaster while assisting the broader planning and reconstruction processes. In this context, a partnership informed by mutual respect and dedication with a goal of local capacity building was a useful approach to the university-community partnership model.

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