

Homebuilding Plan for Tremé/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier Community Development Approach

December 2007

I. THE PROJECT

Providence Community Housing and Enterprise Community Partners are working on a long term Homebuilding Plan that will build 1500 new homes and apartments in the communities of Tremé/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier. The Plan includes one-for-one replacement of all 900 subsidized, affordable units available at Lafitte prior to Hurricane Katrina. All former residents of Lafitte will have the opportunity to come back, either to new apartments and homes on the Lafitte site or to apartments/homes in the surrounding communities of Tremé and Tulane/Gravier.

Well beyond the damage done to housing, Hurricane Katrina badly ripped the community fabric and social infrastructure of the New Orleans community, and particularly public housing residents. With the community development component of our Homebuilding Plan, Providence and Enterprise are striving to act as a catalyst to rebuilding the social capacity of the Tremé/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier communities. We are doing this by stimulating the creation of networks, the development of leaders, and potentially building some trust back in the institutions dedicated to serving New Orleans communities. We are also working hard to connect to leaders and decision makers in education, health care, child care, employment, safety, recreation, economic development, and other sectors who are in a position to offer the Tremé/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier areas the many services that former Lafitte residents have told us are critical to creating vibrant communities.

II. OUR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Providence and Enterprise are committed to involving former Lafitte residents in the planning and development of their future community.

Our Objective: To make former Lafitte residents a permanent feature of the decision making process.

Two Key Assumptions:

1. People understand the condition of their lives. *We think it's important to be explicit about this assumption because when a community is not involved in a decision making process it is often on the assumption that that people can't perceive the condition of their lives, or that it's not necessary to talk to people because their situation is already clear.*
2. People have the will and capacity to plan together, and can work together to change the conditions for the better. *This assumption counters those who assume that people look out only for themselves, and that this tendency overrides their ability to plan in groups. From our experience, people are not only goal seeking, they are also order seeking. They are*

exceptionally capable of setting objectives in relation to a broader community perspective; identifying and considering choices and the consequences of those choices; and doing this all within the context of shared expectations for the quality of life they are striving to achieve.

Our Approach:

1. Get information out early and often, in person, in print, and online.
2. Be transparent about the decision-making process. Share timelines and milestones, and tell the community which decisions are open to their influence.
3. Demonstrate how community feedback is used.
4. Use existing community networks and relationships to get and stay connected to people.
5. Recognize that community development is a continuous process that involves making choices, acting on those choices, reviewing the results, and then revisiting and refining the approach based on the learning gained.
6. Have a lot of in person contact, including face-to-face, small group and large group discussions are critical to the learning process. People use different words to describe their plans and experiences, and the most effective way to bridge the gaps between understandings – among all those involved – is through the immediate

What is achieved with this approach:

1. People have a better understanding of the community development process and are more receptive to the work of the community development team.
2. Mechanisms are set up for two-way information sharing within the community, and between community development team and the community. This increases the likelihood that conclusions drawn and decisions made by all those involved are based on accurate, rather than misinformation.
3. Community plans reflect the priorities and perspectives of the people that have, and want to continue to, work, live and play in the community.

III. THE MECHANICS

The “mechanics” behind our community development approach includes a number of different outreach and engagement strategies and tools. Several samples of our materials are attached. Our community development program includes the following eleven components:

1. **Quarterly newsletters:** Providence and Enterprise were awarded the Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier Homebuilding Plan project in August 2006, and the first project newsletter went out within a month (in September 2006). The kick-off newsletter went out with a cover letter from the leaders from both organizations, and also included a Feedback Form, along with a stamped, addressed return envelope, designed to seek

baseline information from all former Lafitte residents. Several hundred Feedback Forms were completed and contributed directly to the Homebuilding Plan that guides the work of Providence and Enterprise Newsletters have since been distributed in November 2006, February and May 2007.

2. **Central Call-In Phone Number that is answered by a Community Development team member:** To coincide with the first newsletter, a toll-free hotline was established to enable residents to get in touch with Providence and Enterprise. A database was created to log all details from all calls, including updated name, address, and phone information from residents. Daily and weekly call summaries are produced and forwarded to the community development team. These summaries give our team insight into the needs and priorities of former Lafitte residents, which in turn inform our community development efforts, as well as the design of the community outreach and information sharing activities.
3. **Telephone campaign to contact residents:** Following up on the inaugural newsletter, All Congregations Together (ACT), a faith-based, resident empowerment organization, was retained to make personal contact with all former Lafitte residents. A team of approximately eight people, including former Lafitte residents, made thousands of phone calls to try and track down all 900 families living in 37 different states across the country. Ultimately contact was made with over 550 families between September and December 2006. Calls to residents continue on a monthly basis to invite them to participate in resident meetings and other events hosted by Providence and Enterprise.
4. **Community Planning Workshops/Design Charrette:** Very early in the planning process, two community workshops were held in New Orleans (October 2006) to understand the strengths and challenges facing the Treme/Lafitte and Tulane/Gravier communities, as well as the vision and opportunities that will shape the future. The workshops also focused on the type of housing that residents wanted to live in, including the architecture of their homes, size and layout of rooms, the yard space, and the proximity to neighborhood amenities such as the community center, shopping, health care, and schools. Feedback from the over 300 participants contributed directly to the Homebuilding Plan that guides the work of Providence and Enterprise. These workshops were very interactive, took place around round tables and were structured so that the majority of time was dedicated to seeking feedback from residents participating in the process. In addition to workshops held in New Orleans, a similar workshop was held in Houston. In many cases, transportation assistance was provided.
5. **Monthly meetings with residents:** Starting in early September 2006, meetings were held with the Lafitte Residents Council to introduce the Homebuilding Plan development process, and to seek advice on the broader community consultation approach. Close contact with the Residents Council is ongoing. Starting in February 2007, monthly meetings have also been held between Providence/Enterprise and a larger group of former Lafitte residents to provide updates on implementation of the Homebuilding Plan, to identify and address key issues and questions held by residents, and to introduce residents to the services available in their community (whether offered by HANO, training institutions, etc.). These meetings regularly attract over 50 former Lafitte residents, are facilitated, include a light meal, and minutes are drafted for participant review before being finalized.

6. **Monthly letters to residents:** In response to feedback from residents, the quarterly newsletter was supplemented with a monthly letter distributed by Providence and Enterprise to all former Lafitte residents. The first monthly letter was distributed in April 2007, and continues to come straight from the leaders of both organizations. It provides updates on the status of the Homebuilding Plan, as well as answers to questions and issues frequently raised by residents.
7. **Community events:** In addition to monthly meetings with residents, special events are held occasionally to help keep the community connected. To date a seniors luncheon was held in New Orleans, a residents luncheon was held in Baton Rouge, and a Community Fair is being held on Sunday, August 11, 2007.
8. **Reconcile HUD/HANO, FEMA, and resident databases:** One of the most important assets in our community development work is our contact information database of former Lafitte residents. With every phone call, letter, or email we receive, we update the database. We also update it with information provided on sign in sheets after every meeting.
9. **Case management:** Starting in December 2006, Providence and Enterprise offered case management counseling and direct assistance to former Lafitte residents living in New Orleans. In May of 2007 these services were extended to both Baton Rouge and Houston. These services are offered to all former Lafitte families in these areas, and are being implemented in stages.
10. **Outreach beyond residents:** A significant effort is made to stay continuously connected to other organizations working in the Treme/Lafitte, Tulane/Gravier, and broader New Orleans community. Providence and Enterprise have hosted two multistakeholder discussions to date, and continue to participate in dozens of meetings hosted by others. These meetings explore opportunities to collaborate community development efforts and focus on everything from public safety, schools, job opportunities, support to small businesses, recreation equipment for playgrounds, locating training centers, etc.
11. **Website:** All community development materials are available on the Providence website at www.providencech.org, including minutes from all monthly meetings with residents, all newsletters, and all monthly letters to residents. Announcements for community events are posted, as well as updates of the Homebuilding Plan.

III. RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT

In addition to the outreach and engagement work being led by Providence and Enterprise, a key component of the Community Development Program is being implemented by PICO LIFT (Louisiana Interfaiths Together). PICO specializes in working with communities to increase their capacity to understand, and ultimately influence, the policies and programs that impact their lives. They have a one year contract with Providence and Enterprise to work with former Lafitte residents, focusing on building their capacity to do the research, ask the questions, and ultimately enable them to make informed decisions and provide valuable feedback to Providence, Enterprise, and others regarding the kind of community they want for their future.

IV. WORKING WITH HUD AND HANO

HUD and HANO play a critical role in the Community Development program, attending meetings (HUD/HANO officials were at the public workshops held as part of our October 2006 Design Charrette, and are planning to participate in future meetings with residents), receiving copies of the communications materials and meeting records produced by Providence, and in taking action to respond to the resident feedback received. Key HUD/HANO policy decisions that have responded to the priorities and issues raised by former Lafitte residents include: agreement to phase the redevelopment of Lafitte (so residents can come home to repaired units at the same time as construction of new units is underway); agreement to extend the DVP program to June 2008; and support for the development of new subsidized units that have been designed in response to feedback from former Lafitte residents (i.e. singles and doubles rather than only multi-family housing, front and back yards, larger kitchens, and porches).

V. ATTACHMENTS

1. Hard copy of this report
2. Original Press Release (September 2006)
3. Newsletters (September 2006, November 2006, February 2007, May 2007, September 2007)
4. Community Workshop/Design Charrette Report (October 2006)
5. Houston Community Workshop Report (December 2006)
6. Minutes from all meetings with residents (September 2006 – November 2007)
7. Minutes from meetings with stakeholders (February and June 2007)
8. Monthly letters to residents (April 2007 – November 2007)
9. Invitation to Lafitte Seniors Luncheon (July 12, 2007)
10. Flyer for August 11, 2007 Community Fair

Please also see the Providence website (www.providencech.org)

The Community Development Approach outlined here was developed Nicole Swerhun, an independent consultant retained by Providence and Enterprise to guide the design and facilitation of the community development process. The approach draws on and is supported by the expertise and experience of Jeff Evenson, Director of the Canadian Urban Institute's Centre for the Development of Community Assets. It's implementation has been refined and supported by a number of different people and organizations, including: Jim Kelly, Nadine Jarmon, and Tammy Crumpton from Providence Community Housing, Chickie Grayson, Christine Madigan and Michelle Whetten from Enterprise, Father Michael Jacques from St. Peter Claver Church, Ray Gindroz from Urban Design Associates, Reverend Jennifer Jones and Daniel Mathieu from PICO Louisiana, Mary Fontenot, Cheryl Turner and the team from All Congregations Together (ACT), and HUD/HANO officials.