

Conclusions

The Citizen Advisory Committee's 18 months of work are coming to a close, but the effort to plan our city's future must be ongoing. To be of real value to that longer-term planning effort, our work must accomplish two things. First, our effort needs to build upon the work that precedes it. It must serve as a focal point, drawing together information and opinion from citizens and government, then turning it into well-defined policies. Second, those policies must serve as a foundation for the remainder of the planning effort, faithfully representing community views to all of our leaders. We believe that this document accomplishes those ends.

Within city government, a number of specific efforts contributed their results to our research. Those included the Neighborhood Housing Committee's draft proposals, the Mayor's Economic Development Strategic Plan, the City Hall "Vision" project and the Riverfront Strategic Policy Plan. Participants in each of these efforts exchanged information with the Citizen Advisory Committee during their research, considered our priorities in the development of their plans, and shared those plans with us to inform our own effort. Wherever appropriate, we have incorporated the priorities and themes of those plans into this document.

Major Themes

All of us on the Citizen Advisory Committee share a firm belief that planning is not a finite process, clearly begun and ended within convenient timetables. Instead, it is a living, continuing process, evolving to meet the changing demands of a city and its people. Consequently, we know that the policies and strategies contained in this document are just the beginning of the effort.

As the evolution of the master plan continues, it is important to keep in mind that those goals and policies arose not from isolated thoughts, but from a shared vision. Throughout months of work with the core goals, a pattern emerged. We found ourselves visiting certain themes again and again. These themes helped us frame our vision of the future, and are woven throughout the goals, policies and strategies contained in this plan. They are enduring themes that should be used as a constant in all future planning efforts.

In all, there are eight major themes that link each of the core goals, policies and strategies. They are:

1. **Protect the unique environment and culture of New Orleans.** Both the natural and built environments in New Orleans reflect its unique history and culture. They are priceless, irreplaceable assets. This recognition is reflected in our approach to everything from growth management to basic city services. A consistent theme in all of our policies and strategies is the need to protect and preserve this environment as both a legacy for our children and a valuable economic asset.
2. **Revitalize our neighborhoods.** New Orleans' distinctive neighborhoods are under stress as never before. Recognizing that these neighborhoods are at the

heart of our city and its culture, a consistent theme throughout this document is neighborhood revitalization and protecting the interests of our neighborhood residents. In our approach to City Government, we consistently favor neighborhood management and service delivery. In our approach to growth, we favor programs that develop neighborhood businesses and economically strengthen our neighborhoods. In our approach to arts, recreation and culture, we favor programs that strengthen neighborhood identities and support their role in our city's personality.

3. **Restore the economy of the city.** Our vision of the future depends on reversing the city's economic decline. At every stage of our work over the last 18 months, we have looked for ways that this plan could promote economic recovery and apply the benefits to the challenges New Orleans must overcome. Beyond the traditional scope of economic development, we have uncovered assets in our neighborhoods, in our infrastructure, and in arts, recreation and culture. Rebuilding and leveraging those assets is a major focus of this plan.
4. **Reduce the economic, social and physical isolation of the poor.** Despite the historic diversity of New Orleans neighborhoods, the poor in our city are isolated. In public housing, in economic opportunity, in the delivery of basic services and even in access to arts and recreation, our poorest citizens stand alone. Solving this problem is central to our vision of the future, and is woven throughout the policies and strategies we recommend.
5. **Improve the performance and credibility of city government.** In meeting after meeting, citizens called for improvements in the productivity and leadership of city government. Even if their complaints are completely groundless, the widespread perception of poor performance undermines all of our efforts and signals the need for a change. Stronger performance (and the increases in public confidence that accompany it) will eliminate an important obstacle to achieving our goals and implementing this plan.
6. **Build a stronger commitment to long term planning in New Orleans, and to the effective functioning of the City Planning Commission.** The future of our city is too important and too vulnerable to leave to chance. If we are to achieve any of our core goals, we will have to build and sustain a commitment to planning our future. This will require the professional guidance that only an adequately staffed and equipped planning function can provide.
7. **Build partnerships to solve problems.** The complexity and interdependence of our city's problems defy simple, one-agency or even one-parish solutions. More than ever before, the situation demands that we set aside traditional divisions and recruit partners in our effort. Cooperation between organizations both inside and outside government is going to be the only way to muster the resources we need.
8. **Empower citizens to participate in the planning and government of New Orleans.** We have learned that government needs more than the consent of the

governed. In these challenging times, government needs the active support, both moral and fiscal, of the entire community. In addressing each of our five *Core Goals*, we recommend ways to break the cycle of citizen apathy and mistrust by involving people in both planning and implementation. In this lies an important step toward realizing our vision for the future.

Next Steps

We recognize that there is an urgent need to revise the city's zoning ordinance and related portions of the land use plan. As an interim measure, we support a program designed to address those specific problems immediately, without waiting for the conclusion of a complete master plan. Even these interim measures, however, must consider the goals and priorities of this plan.

While the interim efforts are underway, work should also begin on a long-term plan. We recommend that the long term effort include, at a minimum, the following steps:

An Action Agenda For City Government. Once the goals, policies and strategies of this plan have been adopted by the City Planning Commission, all city departments and agencies (including the Planning Commission) should develop an action agenda that integrates the recommendations with their own work programs. One effective way to accomplish this would be to integrate the *New Century* goals and strategies with the vision and strategic planning efforts currently underway within departments and agencies at City Hall. Another would be to establish a formal coordination mechanism to ensure the productive involvement of appropriate city agencies and departments.

Plans To Achieve Each Core Goal. The first major step in the City Planning Commission's own action agenda should be the development of comprehensive, detailed plans to achieve each of the core goals of *New Century New Orleans*. Those plans should consider all of the functional and technical disciplines, and collectively represent what would be called the *New Century New Orleans* Comprehensive Plan.

Master Land Use Plan. The next major element in the long term plan should be a new Master Land Use Plan. This plan will document the major patterns of land use in the city and propose patterns for the future. It should reflect the goals and priorities of *New Century New Orleans*, and help to implement the related strategies. Important steps in the development of this land use plan include:

- Completing critical preliminary projects, including inventory and mapping of existing uses.
- Preparing a generalized "future land use" plan based on an analysis of the preliminary efforts, for presentation to the public and ultimately for adoption by the Planning Commission.

Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. Using elements of the land use plan along with the goals and strategies of *New Century New Orleans*, the Planning Commission should then undertake a new Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, which is the most concrete, enforceable tool at the city's disposal to promote implementation of the plan. The Zoning

project envisions these major stages:

- Analyzing the major changes in land use patterns envisioned in the land use plan, and identify the zoning revisions necessary to implement them.
- Evaluating patterns of rezoning applications, conditional uses, variances and moratoria to identify problems in the existing ordinance.
- Researching alternative approaches to these problem areas that will permit a more flexible approach to neighborhood issues, without sacrificing the clear, predictable criteria that encourage economic development.
- Working with appropriate technical, civic and special interest groups to draft a new ordinance.
- Presenting a final draft to the Planning Commission for review, and ultimately for enactment by the Council.

Accountability Systems. All future steps in the planning process should include standards or criteria through which we can measure progress toward the *New Century* goals. To encourage accountability and public confidence in the process, this system should include regular reports to the community.

A Commitment to the Community

Ultimately, the most important asset of this plan is that it reflects citizens' hopes for the future of New Orleans. To the extent that we honor those heartfelt dreams, we must commit to the goals and policies of this plan. We must incorporate them in all of our subsequent planning efforts, both in the current program of work and in the years to come.

Our rewards for this commitment are simple. By building toward the goals of our citizens, we earn their support for the implementation of the plan. With that support, we will achieve our vision and ensure a brighter future for New Orleans.

Acknowledgments

The Citizen Advisory Committee gratefully acknowledges the participation of over 400 citizens and agency or department representatives who brought enthusiasm, expertise, special insights and encouragement throughout the development of the *New Century New Orleans* plan. Coordination with major concurrent projects, especially those of the city's *Economic Development Strategic Planning Committee* and *Neighborhood Housing Improvement Advisory Committee* significantly extended that network of involvement and assistance.

Special acknowledgment is given to the consultants and the staff of the core project team made available by the City Planning Commission. Carlos and Kathryn Zervigon of Zervigon International, Ltd. provided invaluable professional facilitation of advisory committee work sessions and the series of public meetings between April 1991 and

May 1992. Paul Seyler gave insightful leadership to a professional team from BBP Marketing Group in providing editing, design and document production services. Both firms have generously provided assistance well beyond their scopes of service.

The project staff, headed by Principal Planner Karen Hilton, AICP, provided the highest quality professional support and guidance from inception of the project to completion of the committee's 18 months of work. Their unflagging energy and commitment to public participation have helped to establish a new standard for authentic community involvement in the planning process. Senior Planners Charles Kirkland, AICP, and Harvey Stern were members of the core team throughout the process. Planning Commission Director John Wilson provided initial impetus to the concept of a citizen advisory committee, and continuous encouragement during our work.

We thank Mayor Sidney Barthelemy, the members of the City Council and the Members of the City Planning Commission for giving us this opportunity to help our city.