

May 2023



When I Get Back to New Orleans

Lower Ninth Ward Follow-Up Visit

**Communities
by Design**

an **Architects Foundation** program

Re

This time I'm walkin' to New Orleans

I'm walkin' to New Orleans

I'm going to need two pair of shoes

When I get through walkin' me blues

When I get back to New Orleans

I've got my suitcase in my hand

Now, ain't that a shame

I'm leavin' here today

Yes, I'm goin' back home to stay

Yes, I'm walkin' to New Orleans

- Fats Domino, "Walking to New Orleans"

Disclaimer

The ideas represented in the following report are those of the Communities by Design design assistance team, based on our observations of the Lower Ninth Ward and its existing plans, the 2018 R/RDAT, the insights gleaned from the community's public workshops and conversations, and the ideas shared with us about the area and the aspirations for it in interactions with a range of stakeholders. The process has informed our thoughts and this report represents our best professional recommendations in the public interest. We do not serve a client in this endeavor. The report, and the process that produced it, is a public service to the Lower Ninth Ward community.

The ideas captured here represent two intensive days of work (March 3-4, 2023) and the information available to us at the time of this writing. We do not expect this report to be followed as verbatim, prescriptive advice. This work represents a beginning – we hope a new beginning – for the area. It should be understood as a developmental tool, and we expect the community will expand on these ideas and amend them as you make it your own. This report serves as an opening mechanism to begin the necessary public work and we expect the ideas to evolve and change as you utilize it and as the Lower Ninth Ward continues to evolve through the public processes to follow.



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Introduction

The following report provides a narrative summary of the March 2023 evaluation visit to the 2018 Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) process in the Lower Ninth Ward. The report summarizes progress-to-date on the implementation of the strategies identified in the 2018 report and assesses current conditions as well as new opportunities for the community to prioritize in its next steps forward.

Background to this report

Until Hurricane Katrina, the Lower Ninth Ward had the highest percentage of black homeownership in the city. However, the storm and its aftermath decimated the neighborhood population, revealing significant gaps in the disaster recovery assistance system. The levee breach destroyed almost 5,000 housing units. As a result, the population dropped from nearly 20,000 to only 6,500 at the time of the 2018 community process. In addition, the Lower Ninth Ward was the subject of 15 prior recovery planning processes from 2005–2018, all of which failed to produce tangible outcomes and momentum for positive neighborhood progress, leading to significant frustration. In 2018, civic leaders in the Lower Ninth Ward reached out to the American Institute of Architects to request a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) process to try a different approach for neighborhood recovery. They articulated the goal of the process as follows:

“It is hoped that the R/UDAT will result in a strategy for the creation of a Lower Ninth Ward Economic Development District, or other mechanism, that will ensure community based planning and development that is cohesive, economically resilient, and grounded in the creation of an equitable, livable, and sustainable community. It is hoped that this R/UDAT leaves us with methods to structure an Economic Development

District that facilitates working directly with municipal authorities and non-profit organizations, churches, private businesses, residents, inhabitants, for economic and holistic development of the Lower Ninth Ward.”

The 2018 Process

In July of 2018, a R/UDAT team worked with the Lower Ninth Ward community in an intensive 4-day public process to produce a set of targeted recommendations that might focus efforts and gain traction. There was significant resident participation in the process, with hundreds of local citizens involved directly in the series of public workshops. As The New Orleans Advocate described the opening workshop, “The workshop attracted about 150 people — nearly every resident who has ever raised a voice at a meeting in the Lower Ninth Ward, it seemed. They divided into four groups, to set neighborhood priorities for housing, economic development, culture and infrastructure. Each group set its own priorities and ideas for implementation.” The paper further observed that “What is surprising is that the residents actually think they may be able to make some headway now, in a neighborhood where progress has long seemed to be stalled. That hope stems partly from residents’ close involvement with two newly elected officials, Mayor LaToya Cantrell and City Councilwoman Cyndi Nguyen. Cantrell participated in Friday’s workshop, and Nguyen, who said she was tied up in another meeting, sent representatives from her office. But it’s also because dozens of Lower Ninth Ward residents finally feel in charge of their own destiny.”

One local resident added that “This is the first time I have seen energy like this in the lower 9th. We haven’t had a process like this before. This feels like a new beginning.” The 2018 community process in the Lower Ninth Ward yielded a series of strategies covering key components of the neighborhood’s revitalization effort, including economic development, culture, housing, and green infrastructure.



Economic Development

The central goal of the 2018 R/UDAT process – the designation of a formal Lower Ninth Ward Economic Development District for the neighborhood – became a reality. This is no small feat and begins to organize the neighborhood for important partnerships that can have economic benefits into the future. The state passed enabling legislation creating the [Economic Development District](#) and the District has enacted a number of initiatives so far. For instance, the Lower Ninth Ward Economic Development District partnered with Friends of King at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Charter High School, Southern University, Criminal Justice Courts and the City of New Orleans to create a Criminal Justice Academy as a career path for local youth. The program allows students to obtain an associates degree and leverage the program for a 4-year degree. This workforce development partnership is an important model to build upon as the neighborhood pursues economic development and employment opportunities for its residents. Additionally, a new [business alliance](#) has formed to support local entrepreneurship in the Lower Ninth Ward.

During the follow up visit, community leaders also expressed concerns over the lack of jobs and economic opportunities for residents of the Lower Ninth Ward. One particular area of concern is the lack of retail and food services available in the ward, and the difficulty they’ve had retaining retail and other businesses. While creativity and ideas are not lacking, entrepreneurial residents have a difficult time finding funding sources to seed their ideas and/or programs that provide support for new business owners. Questions about leveraging the Port Expansion were also abundant.

Blue economy

St. Maurice warehouse

St. Maurice Warehouse continues to provide an opportunity for economic development. The Masonry components of the large structure retain historic character and could be adaptively reused. River access enables a wide array of uses and water-based connections to other parts of the city. There is a demand for and incentives to create maritime industry workforce development opportunities and this location is ideal for those purposes. However, it will require collaboration with the current private owner of the building. There is an opportunity to work with the Port Authority (who owns the land) to encourage conversations between the building owner and the community to pursue opportunities for development and growth.



The Mississippi River Waterfront

The 2018 R/UDAT report declared that “the Mississippi River waterfront is the single most import economic development asset for the Lower 9th,” and for good reason. The ‘Blue Economy’ is a dominant economic

force in the state of Louisiana. A 2015 study found Louisiana led the nation in maritime jobs. One in five jobs in Louisiana is connected to maritime industry. Many of these jobs do not require degrees but do require technical training. The same study found that the state was facing critical workforce shortages in maritime industry, with 91% of companies indicating they believe the state should invest further in workforce development for the industry.

The Port of New Orleans is an economic behemoth, reportedly generating 19,050 jobs and \$3.9 billion of economic output annually across Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard parish as of 2019. The port produces quality employment opportunities, with an average salary of \$74,000 for a port tenant employee, 41 percent higher than prevailing salaries in the area. The Port of New Orleans is economically thriving – and it is preparing to grow dramatically.

The Port of New Orleans is one of the fastest growing container ports in America, and it is the 6th largest cruise port in the nation. In June 2022, the port received over \$96 million from the state for expansion projects. As part of this package, \$30.5 million was earmarked for rehabilitating the 102-yr-old St. Claude Avenue Bridge. The rebuilding project will reportedly install advanced traffic signalization and widen pedestrian and bicycle pathways, improving connectivity across the canal for the neighborhood.

In December 2022, Gov. John Bel Edwards announced a major public-private partnership between the state of Louisiana, the Port of New Orleans and two global maritime companies to build a \$1.8 billion container facility on the Lower Mississippi River. The new Louisiana International Terminal (LIT) will increase the state’s import and export capacity significantly and is projected to create more than 17,000 new jobs statewide by 2050. “This public-private partnership with the Port of New Orleans, TiL and Ports America has the potential to become one of the most impactful economic development projects in our state’s history,”

Gov. Edwards said. This is also an historic economic opportunity for the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward to access employment opportunities that could serve future neighborhood growth.

The 2020 Port of New Orleans Inner Harbor Economic Revitalization Plan (PIER)

The PIER plan is an important framing document for the Lower Ninth Ward for multiple reasons.

First, the plan acknowledges that the port’s surrounding neighborhoods are “high poverty, vulnerable populations often left out of planning and development decisions.” The plan notes that Orleans Parish has a 4.3% unemployment rate, but residents in the Lower Ninth Ward experience 14.7% unemployment – 3 times the state average. It further observes that 32% of households in the area live below the poverty line (double the national rate), and 40% are severely cost-burdened by rents above 50 percent of household income. It notes that 80 percent of workers in the harbor radius commute outside the boundaries for employment, and only 800 both live and work inside the area. It concludes that “the Study Area population is underemployed and consists of mainly minority low-income families – an area where an influx of quality jobs, such as what is being proposed by the PIER plan, could have a significant positive impact.”

Second, the PIER plan directly states that the port’s growth should necessarily benefit the surrounding neighborhoods. As it states, “The projected growth in the maritime industry will contribute to development and growth in the Inner Harbor and increase employment opportunity for the surrounding neighborhoods.” Finally, the PIER plan explicitly commits the Port to working collaboratively with the neighborhoods. It states, “The partnerships brought together for this PIER plan will continue to assess and clean up brownfields both on Port property and in surrounding neighborhoods. The port is committed to working cooperatively with the neighborhoods surrounding the Inner Harbor to ensure

compatible development is a part of the PIER plan and used to align and prioritize resources for job training and development.”

The plan also mentions the Port’s ongoing Maritime Career Info Sessions in the neighborhoods and desire to connect residents to employment opportunities and build workforce partnerships.

The Lower Ninth Ward Economic Development District could not find a more explicit mandate for a mutually beneficial partnership than what is referenced in the PIER plan. It goes so far as to note that “mobility challenges should be addressed in order to connect

Study Area residents with port jobs.” It also observes that there are numerous developable properties in the area and that uses identified in the planning process that are not appropriate for waterfront industrial properties, can “still be sited and eventually serve the local demand for grocers, affordable housing and more.”

Recommendations for the Port

The Lower Ninth Ward Economic Development District should leverage its current workforce development programming and create an additional program with key partners focused on maritime industry. The Port

of New Orleans reports that it is currently developing a workforce initiative with “tenants, related industry businesses, educational institutions, economic development partners, elected officials and others to help connect job providers with job seekers. We are also working with local technical schools, community colleges and four-year colleges and universities to help ensure training opportunities match job needs.” The L9 EDD could broaden its work around criminal justice workforce training to include maritime industry programs, working with the local high schools, community colleges and universities and the Port in a way that is patterned on its existing criminal justice workforce development. It is critical to make some formal connections between the neighborhood and the workforce development partnerships that are being created currently in order to ensure that local residents have access to one of the biggest employment opportunities in the state.

The Harbor School in New York City provides an illustrative case with the pre-eminent model for maritime high school education. It also provides an example for leveraging maritime connections to dramatically improve high school completion, college admission rates, and career pathways to success. The following overview of the school demonstrates the impact that these kinds of integrated programs can have:

“On the fourth floor of the Bushwick Campus High School were 125 freshmen who lived almost exclusively in the surrounding neighborhood in Brooklyn. At the time, the New York City Department of Education looked to Harbor School to help improve the community’s local graduation rate, which had hovered for too long at 24 percent. Offering a maritime-themed academic program, despite its land-locked location, Harbor School infused the standard New York State Education Department Regents-based curriculum with high-interest, water-related topics and then brought those topics to life by exposing students to local water bodies, including New York Harbor, the Hudson River, the East

River, and the Gowanus Canal. By 2010, Harbor School had improved the local graduation rate by more than 200 percent.

In 2010, Harbor School moved to its new home on Governors Island and expanded its efforts to admit students from all five boroughs of New York City. Today, Harbor School serves a diverse group of four hundred and thirty-five students, who come from neighborhoods across the city, both public and private middle schools, and whose life experiences and interests bring them to a high school focused on marine science and technology. All current students at Harbor School enroll in traditional New York State Regents-based academic courses and one of seven NYS certified Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs of study. As they prepare for college and train for industry, students cultivate an ethic of environmental stewardship and learn about and work toward protecting, conserving, and restoring the environment.”

These programs include the Billion Oyster Project (BOP) which is “a long-term, large-scale plan to restore one billion live oysters to New York Harbor over the next twenty years and in the process train thousands of young people in New York City to restore the ecology and economy of their local marine environment.” The model has been held up as a national success story and multiple US Presidents have visited the school.

Connections to federal resources

The 2020 Port of New Orleans Inner Harbor Economic Revitalization Plan (PIER) was funded by the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA and other entities dedicated additional funding “for environmental assessments in the study area to help bring vacant and underutilized brownfield sites back into commerce.” The EPA has a history of investment related to the port and a commitment to the area moving forward. The agency’s sponsorship of the pilot for the Near-Port Community Capacity Building Project with the Port of New Orleans, the Deep South Center for Environmental



Justice (DSCEJ) and the Lower Ninth Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED) was an important first step toward collaboration even if it was unsuccessful. The EPA currently has multiple major initiatives rolling out on environmental justice grants targeted to community-based organizations that are fantastic opportunities for the Lower Ninth Ward to partner with an eligible organization to bring federal resources to the area. In January, as part of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the Biden administration launched the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Program (EJCPS) Cooperative Agreement Program, with \$100 million in funding, and tens of millions earmarked specifically for community-based non-profits. It includes an Environmental Justice Government-to-Government (EJG2G) Program for state and local governments partnering with community-based organizations as well. The funding cycle is currently open, with a deadline of April 14, 2023. In February, the new Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Grantmaking (EJ TCGM) Program was launched with \$550 million as a competition to “select multiple Grantmakers around the nation to reduce barriers to the application process communities face and increase the efficiency of the awards process for environmental justice grants.” These programs represent historic federal investments in our communities which are unprecedented, and the Lower Ninth Ward has an enormous opportunity to build the necessary local partnerships to access significant resources through these vehicles. There are potential partnerships at the city level, and with organizations such as the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, that can be leveraged toward these resources.

Connections to philanthropic resources

There are also significant philanthropic resources that could serve the interests of Lower Ninth Ward initiatives with the proper local partnerships in place. For instance, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) launched the 2023 National Coastal Resilience Fund

(NCRF) Request for Proposals (RFP). The goal of this funding is to “make investments in planning, design, and implementation of natural and nature-based solutions. The goal is to enhance protections for coastal communities from the impacts of storms, floods, and other natural coastal hazards and to improve habitats for fish and wildlife.” This funding could serve ongoing efforts with bayou restoration and coastal resilience.

Other recommendations

EPA grant opportunities

One immediate opportunity is applying for a Thriving Communities EPA Grant. This grant will provide “11 eligible entities to become grantmakers. Grantmakers will design competitive application and submission processes, award environmental justice subgrants, implement a tracking and reporting system, provide resources and support to communities, all in collaboration with EPA’s Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights. The EJ TCGM program was created to reduce barriers to the application process and increase the efficiency of the awards process for environmental justice grants.” By applying to this grant, the Lower Ninth Ward Economic Development District would be able to award other groups funding for programs and projects, including some of those included below. Note that the application deadline in May 31st, meaning a quick turn around. For information about the grant and the requirements for the application, explore [here](#).

Economic Development District capacity building

The formation of the Economic Development District was an essential step forward in coordinating and leveraging the many interests operating in the Lower Ninth Ward. The board of governing the district can develop a strategic plan that is evidence based and informed by economic trends impacting the [Greater New Orleans Region](#). Capacity building will require long-term

partnerships with institutions that can provide long-term resources. Regional examples include the work of the [Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard Merchants and Business Association](#), and national examples include the Livernois /McNichols Corridor Plan .

Creating an environment for small businesses to thrive

In order for businesses to start and thrive in the Lower Ninth Ward, the board and stakeholders of the economic development district can form partnerships that offer more opportunities for those who are considering starting business. While start-up costs for any business can be prohibitive, incubators and accelerators can reduce the risk for resident looking to start a business. In addition to rented or shared spaces, tools, or machinery, it is also critical that new small business owners are provided the necessary knowledge to maintain a successful business, such as workshops on how to create a business plan, how to approach investors, etc.

Addressing the food desert

Given that the Lower Ninth Ward is a food desert, there is also opportunity for farmers markets or other programs to ensure residents have access to nutrient dense foods. The Guerilla Garden was active at the time of the 2018 AIA R/UDAT. Stakeholders shared that leadership transitions have resulted in its lack of recent consistent programming and maintenance. The garden could still be an important homegrown outlet for sharing best practices in healthy lifestyles and food systems. Reconnect with them as well as the Backyard Gardeners Network to develop new programming. Additionally, cuisine is central to New Orleans culture and tourism experience. There will continue to be a demand for fresh microgreens, herbs, and produce. The abundance of vacant land in the Lower Ninth Ward creates a unique opportunity to partner in a strategy to use open lots for foods that could be purchased and used by local and city restaurants. Go Green NOLA offers local technical expertise.

Increasing economic activity with Jackson Barracks

While currently there is limited interaction between the military community in Jackson Barracks and the civilian community in the Lower Ninth Ward, Jackson Barracks is a potential market for local businesses and services.

Culture

The Lower Ninth Ward has had a number of important developments in leveraging local cultural strength for revitalization and through them is building a new narrative of the neighborhood. In 1960, civil rights icon Leona Tate was one of the first African-American students to integrate McDonogh 19 Elementary School and face down angry segregationists. Today, she is leading the transformation of the former school into a new civil rights museum and learning center: The [Tate, Etienne, and Prevost \(TEP\) Center](#). The goal of the museum project is “to help educate the public on the



push to desegregate New Orleans as well as train the next generation of racial equity and justice activists.” In addition to its educational components, the TEP Center already provides affordable housing for seniors and hosts community events (including the R/UDAT follow up visit). The project represents a transformative narrative that is in motion in the Lower Ninth Ward.

In December 2021, the celebrated jazz drummer Herlin Riley – a Lower Ninth Ward resident – helped launch the opening of Kevin Beasley’s garden project, a creative installation that was the result of an evolving commission for the Prospect New Orleans art triennial. Beasley made his own investment on top of the commission and purchased land and made a commitment to place that is more permanent. The site is the same location where artist Paul Chan staged Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot” in 2007, which elicited the observation at the time that the empty and vacant area was “a character itself.”

In 2022, Caffin Avenue, where Antoine “Fats” Domino lived until his passing in 2017, was officially renamed in his honor. Fats Domino Avenue was celebrated with a street festival featuring a second line band and other musical performances. The Lower 9 Fest neighborhood festival also kicked off in 2022 featuring over 90 businesses, organizations, and government agencies and over 500 attendees. Keith Calhoun and Chandra McCormick, the famed local photographers, also continue their important work and cultural contributions that capture the neighborhood as well. These projects put forward an important new narrative of neighborhood revival, and contribute to other cultural happenings in the Lower Ninth; one can feel a culture-driven neighborhood momentum gaining steam.

Roadblocks to moving forward

Community leaders shared a deep belief that the social fabric of the community was held by three pillars: businesses, schools, and religious institutions.

especially. After Hurricane Katrina, schools were closed in the Lower Ninth Ward and the remaining schools were transition into charter schools. Due to that, and the lack of stable business atmosphere, the Lower Ninth Ward has lost much of its social cohesion. However, the Lower Ninth Ward has a deep cultural and historic importance and building on that foundation can encourage more social cohesion.

Recommendations

Develop a Fats Domino Resource Center

As a continuation of successful events, there is an

opportunity to create a Fats Domino Resource Center. The resource center would provide space and access to programs to support the development of creative arts and media entrepreneurship in the Lower Ninth Ward. Economic Development District board and stakeholder will need to continue to cultivate their relationship with the Domino family and estate to increase the visibility and impact of Fats Domino’s presence on the Lower Ninth Ward community. [NEA grants](#) for arts education professional development and collective impact could support this effort.



Youth engagement

In order to address the difficulty in communicating with the community about events, opportunities and relevant issues as well as the perceived disinterest of the younger generations in the future of the ward, there may be opportunities to engage local youth. Working with the local school to create a cohort of students interested in spreading the word about local happenings through their preferred medium can help increase their civic engagement and provide more outlets for getting information to the community.

Festivals as revenue generators for local economic development

The overwhelming success of the Fats Domino Avenue street renaming festival and the Lower 9 Fest suggests that there could be an opportunity to host larger events in the Lower Ninth Ward. With leadership and management, festival revenue could be an important resource for community improvements. National examples of how festivals can fuel local improvements include the [Zora Neale Hurston Festival](#) in [Eatonville, Florida](#).

Create an arts corridor

As has become abundantly clear, the Lower Ninth Ward has a rich cultural history; however, to reap the benefits of all that culture, the community must create a threaded narrative. One way to accomplish this is by creating a corridor that guides residents and visitors alike through the creative side of the Lower Ninth Ward. This work will require partnerships but can occur in different ways. National examples include [Dallas's activating vacancy project](#), Houston's Project Rowhouse, and the ongoing work of the [Hill District Community Development Corporation](#). leveraging NEA's Our Town grant program to catalyze action by coordinating local and national technical expertise. The [Mellon Foundation's Humanities in Place](#) program is a new and inclusive grant making program that could be funding

resource for initial steps. Additionally, forging long term partnerships with stakeholders and building owners in the district can seed innovative strategies like those used in the [18th and Vine District](#).

Green Infrastructure

In December 2021, the city broke ground on \$7.2 million worth of road and drainage projects in the Lower Ninth Ward. Local press on the groundbreaking included one resident observation that the neighborhood “had not seen this level of investment in the Lower Nine in more than 16 years.” In addition, the team’s recommendation to focus on the core received a boost with a key portion of St. Claude Avenue being designated for Louisiana’s Main Street Recovery program. The program grants up to \$10,000 for either interior or exterior building rehabilitation projects in the corridor. The city announced that it anticipated 17 separate infrastructure projects would be completed during 2022.

Roadblocks to moving forward

While the city has begun work on road and drainage projects, the residents have yet to see a substantial positive impact from the \$7.2 million dollars dedicated to their infrastructure. A ground-truthing exercise revealed that while work had started to fix roads, there did not seem to be a recognizable logic to the streets that were being fixed. For example, there were several streets that had removed the existing paving, but progress had not



been made in some time to complete the resurfacing. Intersections were also notably neglected; while some streets were resurfaced or excavated in anticipation for resurfacing, the intersections were skipped, making it difficult for drivers to navigate potholes. While you could see that new curbs were installed throughout neighborhood streets, these new curbs were constructed sporadically (sometimes skipping a few blocks at a time). Given this disjointed approach, it is unclear whether any of the infrastructure projects that had been projected for 2022 have been completed.

The community also has particular concerns about the environmental safety of expanding the industrial canal, as well as the access and economic impacts it might have on the community. While initially involved in the expansion of the Canal, the City decided to step back from the project, allegedly as a result of environmental concerns. The Corps of Engineers has now taken on the project, however the disclosure of possible environmental and health impacts of the project on the community has been opaque. While an impact study is being conducted, it is not expected to be completed until 2025.

Since the Lower Ninth Ward is surrounded by water and has only 3 access points to the rest of New Orleans, the process of expanding the industrial canal (and therefore closing one of those access points) would place significant pressure on the residents’ ability to enter and exit their neighborhood. In addition, with the two remaining bridges rising several times a day, the project has the potential of stranding thousands of residents.

Given the duration of the project (estimated at 12 years), the impact on the economic growth of the Lower Ninth Ward, will likely be significant. While the community is expected to receive \$90million in mitigation funds as a result of the project, they will not see that money until the project is completed.

Community leaders feel strongly that substantial community engagement needs to happen to ensure that

residents understand what is happening and can bring up any additional concerns.

Recommendations

Advocate for a complete street approach to coordinated street repair

The AIA R/UDAT event in 2018 convened a community stakeholder workshop including city staff with expertise in street and infrastructure repair. In that conversation, city staff claimed that they were restricted to internal systems of street repair developed before an influx of federal funding. At that time, most of the funding was unspent, and restricted to restoring streets to their pre-Hurricane Katrina conditions. Lower Ninth Ward stakeholders advocated for coordinating the unspent funding to focus on creating complete streets (both curbs and the street including intersections). Continued advocacy in coordination with city council representatives and others is required to communicate the continued negative impacts of current infrastructure processes on community life. Unspent American Recovery Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds could be applied to streamline the street repair process.

Advocate for partnerships to receive new environmental justice funding

The industrial Canal Expansion is an ideal candidate for funding through the Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Grantmaking (EJ TCGM) Program. Continue to build relationships with the Army Corps of Engineers as well as the Port of New Orleans in the pursuit of a community-agency alliance to fund and implementation of community-centered improvements to the canal.

Leverage future Community Lighthouses

During the follow-up visit, community leaders mentioned Together New Orleans’ Community Lighthouses. These

community hubs will be designated cooling centers and will be equipped with solar energy to reduce dependency on the grid after a disaster event. Each site will have prepositioned materials such as food and water. They will also serve as information hubs and will each have a team that supports the community year round. As funding arises, Together New Orleans is hoping to establish 80+ Community Lighthouse; three of those sites have been identified for the Lower Ninth Ward: Central Missionary Baptist Church, St. Copa Community Development Corporation, and New Israel Baptists Church. Not only can these hubs be an important asset during a disaster, they can also become an additional communication network to share important information with community members.

Invest in and promote the Sankofa Wetlands

Since the R/UDAT in 2018, significant progress has been made on the Sankofa Wetland and National Trail (found between Florida Avenue and Bayou Bienvenue). However, community leaders are frustrated that access to the viewing platform on Bayou Bienvenue has been eliminated by the new construction. Making sure there is unrestricted access to the wetlands provides great recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

The wetlands are critical not only to the biodiversity and ecological success of the community, but it can also act as a buffer during hurricanes to protect residents and the built environment. Finding funding sources such as grants from the [National Coastal Resilience Fund](#) is critical in order to continue to enhance the wetlands.

Housing

The repopulation of the Lower Ninth Ward remains a work in progress and a central goal for the future health of the area, but some progress has been made since the 2018 community process. According to the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, approximately 200 units of housing have been developed in the Lower Ninth in the past couple of years, adding to neighborhood population. The rehabilitated units have been dispersed throughout the neighborhood, so they lack a sufficient concentration to draw amenities thus far in a neighborhood that is a food desert and contains no grocer or restaurants. However, they represent important early steps toward a full-scale neighborhood recovery.

Roadblocks to moving forward

There are still a significant number (40 to 60) of vacant properties in the Lower Ninth Ward, including 32 empty Make It Right/ Global Green lots, and a handful of former schools. Almost all of the vacant properties in the Lower Ninth Ward are zoned for residential use. Many of these vacant properties have seen excessive dumping. While there have been efforts to clean up empty lots, the positive effect is short-lived; as soon as the grass grows again, it becomes a ground for dumping. IN addition, while residents want to acquire those properties, the bureaucracy and lack of communication of new rules or requirements has made acquisition nearly impossible.

Out of the new housing units added to the Lower Ninth Ward, the majority are rental units (which has done little to build community and strengthen the social fabric). In addition, community members have concerns about the quality of construction, whether or not they will survive a strong hurricane, and the impact that will have on blight in the future. Residents are also seeing insurance prices increase significantly.

Recommendations

Recruit allies to amplify reports of illegal dumping

Many stakeholders felt that reporting illegal dumping got slow or no response by City staff. However, remaining vigilant in reporting matters. In addition to staff reporting, coordinating advocacy with local institutions, the local councilperson, the mayor, and other community allies will be needed. Among other things, concerns for health and safety in a repopulating community with active schools is an important narrative to share with the rest of the city.

Negotiate with property owners to fence and beautify vacant lots

Identify the owners of vacant properties that are chronic dump sites. Develop design guidelines for fencing and vacant lot beautification within the capacity of community stakeholders. Negotiate with property owners to allow action.

Establish a Community Land Trust

Starting a Community Land Trust (CLT) can be an effective mechanism for acquiring properties and maintaining lower prices for community members. Establishing a CLT will require partnerships and the formation of a board. [Grounded Solutions](#) offers an abundance of resources for the defining the mission and governance structure for a CLT. A local CLT would benefit from the technical expertise of [Crescent City Community Land Trust](#). Establishing relationships with existing property and landowners could help identify where the CLT could acquire properties and under what conditions. Partnerships with local lending institutions, faith-based organizations, and potential funding in partnership with Federal port improvement grants could help capitalize a local CLT until it reaches capacity. There are many successful CLTs across the country, including the [Durham Community Land Trust](#), that can offer examples for local use.





This diagram was generated during the visit and summarizes current issues, key locations, and the biggest opportunities for the Lower Ninth Ward.

Team and acknowledgments

Kofi Boone

Kofi Boone, FASLA is a Joseph D. Moore Distinguished Professor and University Faculty Scholar at NC State University. Kofi is a Detroit native and a graduate of the University of Michigan. His work is in the overlap between landscape architecture and environmental justice with specializations in democratic design and interpreting cultural landscapes. He is the winner of student and professional ASLA awards including the Jot D. Carpenter Teaching Medal. He is Past President of the Landscape Architecture Foundation and serves on the board of the Land Loss Prevention Project.

Paola Capo

Paola Capo is Manager of Climate Action and Resilient Communities at AIA. She strives to provide architects and communities with the resources they need to create healthier, more sustainable and equitable built environments. In her current role, she manages the Disaster Assistance Program (assisting architects and AIA chapters before and after disaster events occur) and supports the Communities by Design program (which matches communities with interdisciplinary expertise to achieve community aspirations). During her time at AIA, Paola has supported several other portfolios related to sustainability and climate action, including the 2030 Commitment program, the Materials Pledge, and the Committee on the Environment, with a focus on building robust programs and resources. She graduated from Georgetown University in 2017 with a degree in Science, Technology, and International Affairs, concentrating on Energy and the Environment.

Joel Mills

Joel Mills is Senior Director of the Architects Foundation’s Communities by Design (CxD) program. The program is a leading provider of technical assistance and democratic design for community success. The Center’s design assistance process has been recognized with numerous awards and has been replicated and adapted across the world. Joel’s 24-year career has been focused on strengthening civic capacity and civic institutions around the world. This work has helped millions of people participate in democratic processes, visioning efforts, and community planning initiatives across four continents. In the United States, Joel has worked with over 100 communities, leading participatory processes that facilitated community-generated strategies for success. His past work has been featured in over 1,000 media stories, including ABC World News Tonight, Nightline, CNN, The Next American City, The National Civic Review, The Washington Post, and dozens of other sources. He has served on numerous expert working groups, boards, juries, and panels focused on civic discourse and participation, sustainability, and design. He has also spoken at dozens of national and international conferences and events, including the Remaking Cities Congress, the World Eco-City Summit, the Global



Democracy Conference, the National Conference on Citizenship, and many others.

Erin Simmons

Erin Simmons is the Senior Director of the Architects Foundation’s Communities by Design (CxD) program in Washington, DC. The program is a leading provider of technical assistance and participatory planning for community revitalization. Erin is a leading practitioner of the design assistance process, providing expertise, facilitation, and support for the Center’s Sustainable Design Assistance Team (SDAT) and Regional and Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) programs. In this capacity, she works with AIA components, members, partner organizations and community leaders to provide technical design assistance to communities across the country. Her portfolio includes work in over 100 communities across the United States. A frequent lecturer on the subject of creating livable communities and sustainability, Erin contributed to the publication “Assessing Sustainability: A guide for Local Governments”. Prior to joining the AIA, Erin worked as historic preservationist and architectural historian for an environmental and engineering firm, where she



practiced preservation planning, created historic district design guidelines and zoning ordinances, and conducted historic resource surveys. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Florida State University and a Master’s degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Georgia.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the community stakeholders that met with the team during this visit. A special thanks to Reverend Willie C. Calhoun for organizing the follow-up visit and Ms. Leona Tate and the staff of the TEP Center who hosted the community stakeholder meetings.





When I get back to New Orleans

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