

# Living Cities, Knight Foundation offer plan for east Biloxi

Report cites need for housing for tourism industry workforce

A detailed rebuilding plan calls for revitalization of east Biloxi's historic neighborhoods to provide a critical need: mixed-income housing for long-time residents and for the tourist industry workforce powering the city's post-Hurricane Katrina recovery.

The action plan offers the city, its businesses and citizens a planning framework for balanced and specific land-use guidelines and recommends their swift adoption.

The report, commissioned by Mayor A.J. Holloway and prepared by Living Cities Inc. and Goody Clancy, was presented to the Biloxi City Council. Titled *Moving Forward: Recommendations for Rebuilding East Biloxi*, the report has four main recommendations:

- 1) Respond to the significant opportunity presented by the nature and scale of the impending economic development, fueled by the gaming and entertainment industries.
- 2) Shepherd growth by putting a land-use road map in place.
- 3) Strengthen the city's tools for managing development.
- 4) Make affordable housing a cornerstone of the coming economic recovery.

Said Mayor Holloway: "We're working toward a realistic plan to rebuild Biloxi, including the hard-hit eastern end of our city. Our goal is to have a plan that includes a realistic timetable and realistic price tag, and a plan that takes into account the views of the diverse population we have here in Biloxi."

Biloxi is the second largest of the 11 South Mississippi communities slammed in August 2005 by Hurricane Katrina, the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history.

Participating in the presentation were Living Cities CEO Reese Fayde and Gulf Coast consultant Gordon Brigham. Living Cities is an investor collaborative of 16 major financial institutions, foundations, and a government agency that has invested almost \$375 million in 23 urban neighborhoods throughout the county since 1991. Goody Clancy is an award-winning architecture, planning and preservation firm from Boston.

Funding for the report came from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (a founding partner of Living Cities), the Mississippi Development Authority

and the Biloxi business community.

"We are particularly impressed that the governor, the mayor and the City Council are poised to act and that they collectively put pressure on us to deliver this report," said Fayde. "Biloxi has two of the three ingredients needed to cultivate major economic development – strong investment and a predictable customer base. This report says the missing piece is an expanded workforce that needs affordable homes."

"This is an action plan for east Biloxi – a balanced road map for rebuilding the city's economic heart and keeping intact its cultural soul," said Alberto Iburgien, president of the Knight Foundation. "The plan's recommendations provide the information needed by the city, its businesses and the long-time residents of East Biloxi to make their own informed decisions in the immediate future."

The report builds on the long-range rebuilding approach inspired by the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal and is closely linked to the recommendations presented to Mayor Holloway by the Biloxi Reviving the Renaissance Committee, established by the mayor and chaired by retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Clark Griffith.

The planning framework anticipates East Biloxi building on its pre-Katrina direction, ultimately becoming a tourist, entertainment and gaming destination of national stature.

To accommodate the workforce, the land use planning framework anticipates a total of 5,500 housing units, up from 3,500 units before the storm, including single-family houses, townhouses and multifamily units reflecting designs sympathetic to the city's historic architecture. New lower-density housing would be incorporated into the fabric of existing neighborhoods on less flood-prone higher ground. Housing would be targeted to serve residents at every income level.

- Other elements include:
- A vital, attractive downtown incorporating housing and cultural attractions.
  - A seafood village on the Back Bay waterfront that combines berthing space for the commercial fishing fleet, seafood restaurants and retail outlets, and commercial processing space.



# Reviving the Renaissance

City's volunteer-driven initiative showcases Biloxi's unprecedented potential after storm

The complete *Reviving the Renaissance* report, which includes the *Living Cities* focus on east Biloxi, is available online at [biloxi.ms.us](http://biloxi.ms.us).

By Lt. Gen. Clark Griffith  
(USAF Retired) Chairman,  
*Reviving the Renaissance* initiative

As part of his State of the City address delivered just months after Biloxi and the Mississippi Gulf Coast suffered the worst natural disaster in American history, Mayor A.J. Holloway announced the establishment of the Reviving the Renaissance initiative.

This committee, the mayor instructed, would utilize the same structure as the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal. Appropriate issue teams would research and develop specific recommendations that the mayor and the City Council could use to "revive the Renaissance" that was taking place in Biloxi before Katrina.

The mayor's charge – and our mission – was simple, but clear: develop a realistic plan, with a realistic timetable, and a realistic price tag.

The complete reports from the several committees, along with attachments and supporting data, are available online at [www.biloxi.ms.us](http://www.biloxi.ms.us).

Following is an Executive Summary of the plan developed by our volunteer committee. It addresses the immediate challenges to bring Biloxi back to its pre-Katrina prosperity, while realizing that the devastation left behind by the storm presents unique opportunities. It clearly points out Biloxi's true potential and identifies specific recommendations that will get us there.

## How it all began

For 35 years, I had the honor and privilege to serve our country in the U.S. Air Force. During that time, I saw combat, accidents, disasters, personnel/policy changes, and many other things that presented leadership challenges. None of these, however, compare to the leadership challenges we all face as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Soon after the storm, we got our first glance at how our President, Governor, and elected officials planned to respond to these challenges. It would take everyone working together toward a common goal if that was going to happen.

We needed a plan that everyone could agree with

and support. The initial meeting of the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal was held in a tent outside of Gulfport on Sept. 20.

The Governor was very clear in his vision for the Commission and later stated it in a letter to each Commissioner. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild the right way and make the Coast bigger and better than ever. What we do now will decide what the Coast will look like in 10 years, 20 years, and beyond. If we build the Coast and South Mississippi back just the way it was, we will have failed." He introduced Jim Barksdale, former CEO of Netscape, who was appointed Chairman of the Commission's Executive Committee. Jim expanded the vision of the Commission to include:

The ability and charter to revitalize and revolutionize over the next several years:

- What the Gulf Coast and South Mississippi can look like;
- What it can produce in the way of jobs and income; and
- What it can change and improve in people's lives in all levels of society.

He summarized the task at hand with these words: We have been asked to do this. We will do this,

because if we fail, we will have no one to blame but ourselves. Our State, the nation, and the world stand ready and willing to help us in this noble goal after such a tragic disaster. We will not let them down.

At this point, if there were doubters in the audience about the importance of this effort, all doubt disappeared when the President of the United States walked into the meeting. President Bush was very supportive of all that had been presented and pledged his support to the effort. From the outset, the point was made that this Commission was **ADVISORY ONLY!** It would provide information on choices, options, and alternatives, along with recommendations for recovery, rebuilding and renewal. The decisions, however, would be made by the local governments, state government, and the private sector... not the Commission.

Jim Barksdale and his staff put together an aggressive organizational structure and timeline. This included several key issue committees that included transportation, infrastructure, education, health care, housing, tourism, defense and government issues, small business, finance, agriculture, forestry, and marine resources. All of these

committees began their initial meetings to explore what recommendations would be made.

A big part of this gigantic effort took place in Biloxi from Oct. 12-17, 2005. A Rebuilding and Renewal Forum was held where each of the eleven hardest-hit towns on the Coast got access to the best architects, engineers, and planners from Mississippi and around the world. Teams of professionals visited each town and asked the people what they wanted their towns to look like when they rebuild.

These ideas were put together in a massive brainstorming/designing charrette, which was presented to local officials for their comments. These included ideas on community redevelopment, rerouting of streets and highways, and actual architectural designs to retain the historical beauty and charm of each community. This also included proposed FEMA flood zone advisories and recommendations on where and how to rebuild stronger/storm resistant buildings and homes.

The biggest question becomes... how do get any or all of this done? Plans are interesting, but how do you make it happen? This is a work in progress as the

Governor, Mayors, elected officials and community leaders work this very hard. Some very positive results have already happened. These include:

- Our State Legislators passed and the Governor signed a modified "on-shore" casino rebuilding law which help revitalize a stronger and more storm resistant casino industry.
- A Federal relief plan has been worked out in Congress and signed into law by the President which will provide disaster relief to communities, businesses, and individuals for rebuilding.
- The final recommendations from the Governor's Commission have been completed and published which will provide solid recommendations to all communities on how to proceed toward the future.
- The Rebuilding Forum has published and distributed two books that provide communities and homeowners a blue print for reconstruction. These books are full of ideas of how to rebuild and how to retain the rich tradition of the Gulf Coast architectural beauty and heritage.

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