



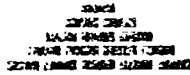
*Relief*



*Recovery*



*and*



*Revitalization*



*Center*

# East Biloxi Community Plan


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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

For the 20,000 residents of East Biloxi displaced by Hurricane Katrina, the rebuilding of their community is a tense and troubling process. Residents face new proposed flood elevation requirements, new waterfront zoning regulations that are bringing the casinos further inland, uncertain employment prospects, insufficient information about the future of the neighborhood's retail base, community facilities and schools, and home rebuilding costs that threaten to exceed available funds. In addition, they must contend with the fear that their interests are being subordinated to more powerful economic forces that threaten to create a community both unrecognizable and unaffordable to many who call the city's historic heart home.

In order to ensure that the longtime residents of East Biloxi have a voice in the neighborhood's recovery, the East Biloxi Coordination and Relief Center in January, 2006, launched the first phase of the East Biloxi Community Restoration Initiative, a community planning and rehabilitation effort that seeks to engage the talents and perspectives of East Biloxians in the rebuilding. This first phase, an intensive community outreach process, was designed to identify and articulate the needs, priorities, resources and ideas of community residents. While working towards immediate recovery, the planning process allows East Biloxians to consider the long-term prosperity of the area and develop a shared vision for the future.

The Center retained the community development consulting firm of Warnke Community Consulting (WCC) to coordinate and facilitate the planning process phase of the overall Initiative. The Center also coordinated with the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio (GCCDS) at Mississippi State University to assess the condition and current use and occupancy of buildings in East Biloxi. Working together, the Center and WCC gathered local leaders to form the East Biloxi Community Restoration Initiative Local Advisory Committee (LAC) to help inform and guide the process.

Staff from WCC and GCCDS, along with a team of volunteers led by Hands On USA, gathered the qualitative and quantitative data for this report from March 8 to May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006. The data collection utilized four primary methods: a community survey, a land use and building condition survey, six community meetings and one-on-one interviews with community leaders.

### Community Survey

The survey comprised 53 questions ranging from demographic information to questions about respondents' likes and dislikes of the area, and what they view as the most important concerns for the future. Surveyors collected 511 usable surveys.

### Demographics *(based on 511 respondents)*

- Most of the survey respondents identified themselves as 'African-American' (38%) or 'White' (37%), followed by 'Vietnamese' (13%) and 'Hispanic' (9%).
- The vast majority of respondents (88%) replied that they speak English well enough to be understood. Twelve percent responded that they speak Vietnamese and 12% Spanish. Approximately 2% reported that they speak another language.
- Twenty-two percent of respondents are over 65 years of age; 21% between 55-64; 20% between 45-54; 19% between 35-44; 14% between 20-34 and 2% between 15-19 years old.
- The greatest proportion of survey respondents indicated that they completed secondary school (36%), and 16% replied that they completed college. At the same time, a full 24% replied that they did not finish secondary school.
- The greatest proportion of respondents had annual family incomes below \$34,999 both before and after Hurricane Katrina.
- Almost one-half of respondents (47%) replied that they have lived in East Biloxi for more than 21 years.

### Housing

The greatest proportion of respondents (59%) indicated that they are 'Living in a trailer/tent on or near [their] property'.

Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) replied that they owned the home in which they lived before Hurricane Katrina. Thirty-two percent replied that they rented the home in which they lived.

Just over half of all respondents (53%) indicated that they plan to buy or rebuild within Biloxi: 25% chose Ward 2, 15% Ward 1, and 14% 'Elsewhere in Biloxi'. Seventeen percent of the respondents replied that they would buy or rebuild outside Biloxi. It should be noted that 30% of all respondents answered 'Don't know/No response', which may illustrate indecision or uncertainty on the part of this population as to where to live in the future, or that they had no plans to own a home.

### Employment

The greatest proportion of respondents indicated that they work for an employer (31%) or are retired (23%). Thirteen percent are self-employed, 5% are homemakers, and 0.4% chose 'student'. Nineteen percent indicated that they are unemployed.

Respondents were asked to indicate all the businesses or industries in which they have work experience. The top five responses chosen were 'Food/Hotel services', 'Casino', 'Construction', 'Retail', and 'Child care' (it should be noted that 'Education' followed 'Child care' closely).

### Community Likes and Dislikes

Respondents were asked to indicate all the things they liked *most* about living in East Biloxi before Hurricane Katrina. Respondents ranked 'Sense of community' first, followed closely by 'Friends and family'. 'Affordable housing', 'Schools' and 'Good place to raise children' ranked third, fourth and fifth respectively. 'Casinos/Entertainment' ranked a close sixth in priority. 'Infrastructure' and 'Services are available in my language' ranked last.

They were then asked to indicate the things they liked *least* about living in East Biloxi before Hurricane Katrina. In this case, 'Crime' ranked first, followed by 'Lack of affordable housing'. Following this by a fair margin was 'Casinos/Entertainment', followed by 'Infrastructure' and 'Lack of employment opportunities'.

### Community Concerns

When asked to choose East Biloxi's three most pressing concerns *before* Hurricane Katrina, respondents prioritized 1) 'More employment opportunities', then 2) 'More affordable housing', which was followed closely by 3) 'Recreational centers'.

When asked to choose the three most pressing concerns *after* Hurricane Katrina, respondents prioritized 1) 'More affordable housing', then 2) 'More employment opportunities', which was followed closely by 3) 'Loans to improve/purchase homes'.

### Gaming, Tourism and Entertainment Industry

Overall, respondents expressed ambivalence over the rebuilding and expansion of the gaming, tourism and entertainment industry. When given the options, more respondents replied that an expanded gaming industry would create more employment, higher salaries, more or better public transportation, improve infrastructure and services, and more entertainment for residents.

At the same time, however, more respondents also indicated that an expanded gaming industry would create more crime, more pollution, increased housing costs and decreased housing availability, as well as having a negative influence on children.

### Community Revitalization

When asked to prioritize the type of commercial development respondents would like to see more of in East Biloxi, the greatest proportion of respondents ranked 'small independent retail', followed by 'basic services', 'big box retail', and 'chain restaurants'.

As for housing development, the greatest proportion of respondents prioritized 'affordable housing', followed closely by 'private home', then 'public housing' and 'apartment buildings'.

Respondents were asked to choose the three things they most want to see rebuilt, restored or improved in East Biloxi. The greatest proportion of respondents chose 'affordable housing', followed by 'sense of community', and 'employment opportunities'.

## Community Meetings and Interviews

Through the community surveys, interviews and meetings, the residents of East Biloxi identified the following five key areas of primary concern.

1. Rebuilding the housing stock of East Biloxi, including owner-occupied homes, public housing and affordable rental housing, with a focus on affordability and historic preservation so that pre-Katrina residents can return to a neighborhood they recognize as their own;
2. Creating a safer neighborhood, free of drug-trafficking and crime;
3. Developing additional job opportunities, particularly in industries that are part of the rebuilding effort;
4. Developing a more diverse economic base distinguished in particular by a balance with the casinos, preservation of the seafood industry and smaller-scale, neighborhood-friendly retail businesses, family entertainment venues and restaurants; and,
5. Creating and maintaining neighborhood parks, community centers, schools and community-based service and housing organizations.

As in the community surveys, the related issues of affordable housing and of rebuilding homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina were given top priority during the community meetings and one-on-one interviews. At the same time, other issues common to low-income communities remain important to East Biloxians. Community members' hopes extend beyond restoration of what existed prior to Hurricane Katrina to encompass a vision of a better community for all residents of East Biloxi today. These hopes include a community that is safer, more economically viable, linked to its past and rich with educational and recreational opportunities for young and old.

## The Action Plan

The following recommendations are based on the five key areas of concern, as identified through the planning process.

### Housing

#### A. Short-Term Recovery and Planning

- Work with community-based organizations (the Biloxi Relief, Recovery and Revitalization Center, Visions of Hope, Back Bay Mission, Mercy Housing & Human Development, Coastal Women for Change, Mississippi Immigrants Rights Association, among others), nonprofit relief organizations and churches and temples to create education and advocacy campaigns to inform residents of their options;
- Continue to develop forums and processes through which community residents can organize the community into an effective and engaged whole;

- Establish linkages with Enterprise Corporation of the Delta and other community-based financial and training organizations to build financial literacy and training programs for homeowners and prospective homeowners in East Biloxi;
- Increase outreach and community building efforts by rebuilding local neighborhood organizations and exploring ways of involving displaced residents-- homeowners, renters and workers-- in decisions regarding the community's future; and,
- Improve communications between initiatives and organizations planning East Biloxi's future, including casino and larger business interests.

### B. Longer-Term Rebuilding

#### *Rebuilding Owner-occupied Housing*

- Capitalize and administer a loan fund providing funding for rehabilitation and new construction of homes for pre-Katrina homeowners;
- Expand and improve database for housing repairs and work orders;
- Enhance capacity of the Biloxi Relief, Recovery and Revitalization Center (the "Center"), or another lead organization, to coordinate activities of nonprofit relief organizations and of contractors to ensure expedited and professional repair and rebuilding;
- Explore the creation of a Community Land Trust or another alternative ownership mechanism to allow pooled resources, land and rebuilding opportunities; and,
- Develop and implement fair systems for evaluating need and prioritizing allocation of resources to ensure that residents have the opportunities to return.

#### *Developing New Affordable Housing Opportunities*

- As part of an effort to maintain housing affordability in East Biloxi, create opportunities for new housing, including lease-purchase ownership opportunities and development on in-fill lots funded through Low Income Housing Tax Credit or Gulf Opportunity Zone resources;
- Investigate the creation of a Housing Trust Fund or other long-term affordable housing financial resource funded through dedicated ongoing PILOT fees or tax or fee revenues;
- Explore other opportunities, including partnerships with nonprofit developers and the Biloxi Housing Authority, for purchasing land and developing affordable new construction subdivisions using the HOPE VI development as a model;
- Work with casinos and other businesses to develop decent, secure rental housing for returning workers and new employees, again using the HOPE VI development as a model;
- Ensure preservation of historic homes through advocacy, fundraising and education for neighborhood organizations and owners of historic properties; and,
- Mandate the creation of affordable housing units as a percentage of all luxury condominium development.

### *Maintaining Public Housing*

- Ensure that East Biloxi's HOPE VI housing is rebuilt and remains available and affordable for community residents.

### *Senior Housing*

- Partner with nonprofit organizations to preserve and increase affordable housing opportunities for seniors by identifying appropriate vacant land for new senior housing facilities and advocating for the rebuilding of senior housing destroyed by the storm.

### **Public Safety**

- Create an East Biloxi police precinct with an active presence in the heart of the community;
- Expand and enhance Neighborhood Watch programs, with support and funding through the City of Biloxi and available federal programs;
- Improve relations between police and the community through regular meetings, Neighborhood Watch activities and on-foot neighborhood police patrols;
- Establish an anonymous phone system for reporting crime and/or suspicious activities; and,
- Improve street lighting.

### **Creating Job Opportunities**

- Create job training programs, especially in industries engaged in the redevelopment of the community;
- Support enhanced public transportation, enabling residents to reach employers throughout the city;

### **Diversifying the Economic Base**

#### A. Preserve and Expand the Seafood Industry

- Preserve land along the waterfront for commercial seafood industry use;
- Rebuild and expand the Biloxi Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum;
- Create a commercial Fishing Wharf with tourist attractions, day fishing trips and a fish market, among other attractions.
- Establish a dry dock;
- Clean debris from local waters and dredge channels to accommodate larger boats; and,
- Increase fuel and ice availability at the docks, and add finger piers for docking and unloading.

#### B. Develop Smaller-Scale Retail Businesses and Family Entertainment Venues

- Amend zoning rules to support mixed-use development in a variety of areas;
- Capitalize and administer a small business loan fund;



- Develop community-based technical assistance and training programs for small business owners, including development of a business incubation or “virtual incubation” program:
- Establish a downtown outdoor market during evening hours and weekends;
- Redevelop and enhance the Vieux Marche as quickly as possible; and.
- Create special opportunities for family entertainment venues.

## Quality of Life

### *Parks & Community Centers*

- Clean, refurbish and maintain neighborhood parks, including installation of new playground equipment;
- Incorporate maintenance of parks under Neighborhood Watch and community policing activities;
- Create community gardens;
- Open neighborhood-based, multi-generational community centers to provide structured recreational and after-school programs for neighborhood youth; computer centers; pre-school and child care facilities; and day programs for senior citizens.

### *Schools*

- Restore the neighborhood’s public schools on a clear, expedited timeline;
- Advocate for a level of excellence that encourages former residents, both renters and homeowners, to return to East Biloxi and attracts new families to the neighborhood.

### *Community-based Housing and Service Organizations*

- Develop the East Biloxi Relief, Recovery and Revitalization Center into a community-based Community Development Corporation, capable of expanding its portfolio of activities to encompass housing and economic development;
- Work to strengthen the ability of other organizations, including Back Bay Mission, Moore Community House, MIRA, Visions of Hope, Coastal Women for Change and others, to deliver a web of services and support to the East Biloxi community;
- Develop an implementation task force to continue planning and implementation work.