

Recovery After Hurricane Katrina: Tales of Four Cities

What Happened?

On August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast area as a Category 3 hurricane with a Category 5 storm surge. The disaster, partly natural and partly human-induced, resulted in about 1,800 deaths, displaced 1.7 million people, and resulted in more than \$150 billion in losses – making it the worst disaster in U.S. history.



Flooding damage to New Orleans housing from levee failures

While the San Francisco Bay Area does not experience hurricanes, this disaster provides a unique learning experience to give local governments in the Bay Area a sense of the types of secondary impacts that disasters can have, particularly as cities and counties struggle to recover.

The following pages summarize a 9-day visit to the Gulf Coast area, focusing interviewing public officials as well as local residents. It does not represent a statistical sampling of the cities or people in the area, but rather the story of four different cities, both large and small, located in three different states.

As staff and elected officials in the Bay Area, we need to work better to plan for recovery to ensure that we avoid saying, in the words of the baseball player Yogi Berra, “It’s like déjà vu all over again.”

Common Themes...

The four cities described on the following pages are very different. However, they all provide us with similar lessons – lessons that were learned earlier in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and the 1994 Northridge earthquake.

People focused on surviving the first hours and days following the storm. Search and rescue crews were out in force while utilities and local governments focused on assessing the damage. People were patient. But as the days turned to weeks, people got increasingly frustrated by the pace of recovery. Elected officials and staff coped with making a set of hard choices on recovery priorities – which buildings are historic and need to be repaired and which ones are not and should be demolished? Which bridges need to be repaired first? How can business remain strong if no one has a place to live? Is it worth rebuilding housing or should we concentrate first on rebuilding our downtown? Tensions grew between those that wanted to rebuild as quickly as possible and those that wanted to rebuild in a way that protects the buildings and property from future storm damage.

“What people miss most is their lifestyle, not the particular building that was their home. We need to make sure that recovery includes the recovery of neighborhoods and lifestyle.”

Keith Twitchell, Committee for a Better New Orleans

As months have turned to years, frustration has turned to anger and a desire to blame someone – anyone – for the slow recovery. Even those who are normally patient are still overly sensitive as they struggle with the seemingly unending process.

Yet some twists of luck and planning can make a huge difference. For example, local governments with the financial abilities to weather the recovery period can lead the way to faster rebuilding.

Over two years following the hurricane, city officials and staff have not yet seen the federal funds for rebuilding that they expected and many are frustrated by the belief that federal and state governments are more interested in paperwork than recovery.

City of NEW ORLEANS – Louisiana

HISTORY – A City Surrounded By Water

Pierre and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne arrived in 1699 and claimed the Mississippi River and all that it drained as French. But it took twenty years for an actual settlement to be constructed on the first significant patch of dry land that explorers found on their way up the river. The chosen river crescent had an added bonus in that Lake Pontchartrain on the north side of the city was brackish – a large secondary bay the size of Lake Tahoe with direct access to the Gulf.

France ceded the City to Spain in 1762 in the secret Treaty of Fontainebleau. After devastating fires in 1788 and 1794, the original French architecture was replaced by Spanish. In one month in 1803, ownership passed from Spain back to France, and then to the United States through the Louisiana Purchase.

Catastrophic flooding in both 1947 and 1965 reached the rooftops of some low-lying and unprotected areas. Following Hurricane Betsy in 1965, Congress passed the Flood Control Act, authorizing the construction of a Hurricane Protection System for New Orleans. Forty years later, in August 2005, this System was still not completed due to the desire of the City to protect a larger area than originally envisioned and repeated “de-funding” by various U.S. administrations.

New Orleans was, and still is, in danger of flooding by the Mississippi River. During the 1800s and through most of the 1900s, the general policy of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been to build higher and longer levees throughout the Mississippi River drainage system, as well as to cut off its natural ability to disperse water and sediments through a system of distributaries. To maintain its huge delta, the river has naturally changed course about once every 1000 years. If left to its own processes, it would have changed course into the Atchafalaya River basin 100 miles to the east. In the massive floods of 1973, this almost occurred in spite of the large weirs created by the Corps. If it happens, the Atchafalaya Basin will be flooded and both Baton Rouge and New Orleans will be on a distributary with a much smaller water flow.

As with the Sacramento-San Joaquin delta, the dewatering of New Orleans has resulted in the oxidation of the organic peat soils and the creation of large areas of the City which are well below sea-level.

Katrina's Impacts

The Hurricane track veered to the east to the Mississippi coast as it approached New Orleans, and observers relaxed, believing that the City had escaped damage. What was not immediately realized was that the storm surge and resulting winds across Lake Pontchartrain on the north side of the City had undercut and then collapsed a levee on a canal leading to the lake, allowing lake water to flow into a portion of the City. Subsequently, levees of the incomplete Corps Flood Protection System failed catastrophically in many places across the City, flooding approximately 80% of the City to a depth of up to 20 feet.

Based on the 2000 census, the City had a population of 484,674, but it had declined to about 455,000 by 2005. Approximately 50% of its 215,091 housing units were flooded with more than 4 feet of water. Yet parts of the City on high ground near the Mississippi River were spared, including the historic French Quarter.

While the mandatory evacuation order resulted in saving thousands of lives, 1,464 people in Louisiana died due to Katrina or being evacuated (State of Louisiana Dept. of Health and Hospitals). Many were poor, and since the disaster occurred near the end of the month, they had no money for gas or bus fare. Others were not evacuated because they were ill and fragile, and the concern was that they could not survive being moved. However, the media coverage of the Superdome and Convention Center provided an overriding impression of emergency response failure.

The infrastructure systems of the City collapsed. In particular, over 30% of customers in the City were still without power 26 days later when Hurricane Rita struck, causing additional damage. Many local roads were flooded and blocked by debris. The I-10 bridge over Lake Pontchartrain was destroyed.



The City's Recovery Effort

City revenues from property and sales tax were devastated. Prior to the disaster, the City employed approximately 6,000 people. Since it was not felt wise to lay off police and fire personnel, the vast majority of the 3,000 layoffs occurred in building, planning, and community development services – positions needed to staff the recovery effort.

The City has designated targeted development areas including one around a NASA facility. NASA has assured the City that it plans to remain, in part because this is the only facility that NASA actually owns, rather than leases. The facility was protected by its own secondary levee system, so it was not flooded. NASA has recently promised to invest \$40 million in facility improvements.

The French Quarter and tourism industry has returned to the City. The Mardi Gras festivities in early February 2008 were attended by more people than ever before in the City's history. The public is voting with its feet that it wants the City to remain.

On the other hand, many of the people who lived in the City, particularly the Lower Ninth Ward, have not returned. As of February 2008, the City only had 70% of its pre-Katrina population, and only 10% of the population of the Lower Ninth Ward. (The population increases during the day as people work on repairing their homes.) The rebuilding of the Lower Ninth Ward is beginning, due in large part to the generosity of various non-profit organizations, not due to federal funds. The FEMA funds to elevate homes that are repaired or newly built are just now arriving. These funds are only available to the original homeowner on the original lot, and only if the homeowner received **The Road Home** program funds to help rebuild. Another thing that has delayed the rebuilding effort is the lack of affordable insurance.

The City is torn between rebuilding the City in the exact form pre-storm, and struggling with the reality of a smaller population for an extended period. Areas with shells of vacant buildings attract criminal activity. At the same time, it is difficult to provide City services to scattered occupied buildings. The City, after two prior comprehensive planning efforts failed, is now embarking on a plan that calls for partial development in all of the City's neighborhoods, but focusing any new development on the highest ground.

“What happened in New Orleans after Katrina was not a natural disaster, though that’s a common misperception. The levee failures and flooding were the second worst engineering failure in human history, second only to Chernobyl.”

Jed Horne, former City Editor
of the *New Orleans Time Picayune* and author

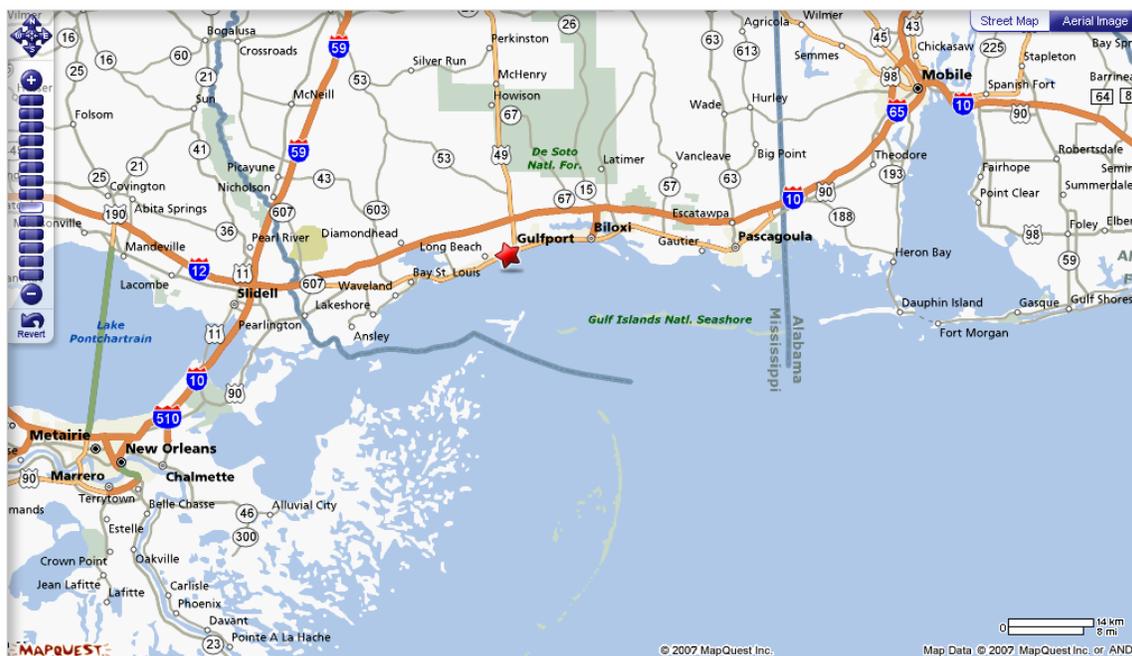
Broken Politics and Recovery

FEMA, desperate to quickly house the displaced residents in “interim” housing, brought in thousands of trailers at a cost of \$70,000 apiece, plus the cost of delivery and installation. But there were many examples of federal rules and policies that actually have slowed down the recovery process. For example, several large multi-family apartments were only moderately damaged with four feet of flooding on the first floor. They could have been repaired at a cost of \$30,000 per unit to serve as both “interim” and permanent housing. FEMA is not allowed by the Stafford Act to pay for “permanent” housing. Negotiators came up with a plan where FEMA would rent the units for two years, and the apartment owner would use the guaranteed revenue stream to take out and repay a short-term loan to pay for the needed repairs. The resulting units would have served as both “interim” and permanent housing. Money was never allocated, and there is the perception that the reason was that the President Bush's administration did not want the Democratic poor Blacks moving back, enabling Louisiana to elect a Republican governor.



Closed school in Lower Ninth Ward planned for mixed use

The political overtones of housing recovery were exacerbated in December 2005 because **initially** Democratic Louisiana and New Orleans received supplemental appropriations from Congress of \$6.2 billion, while \$5 billion went to the State of Mississippi to be distributed by Republican Governor Haley Barbour that lost far fewer units. Subsequently, because of lack of housing damage in Mississippi, some funds have been “redirected” to pay for road improvements out of the coastal damaged area and to fund improvements to the Port of Gulfport. (Louisiana received an additional \$4.2 billion in January 2006.)



City of BAY ST. LOUIS – Mississippi

History of the Community

Bay St. Louis was first settled by Europeans in 1721 and became the earliest incorporated Gulf Coast community in 1818.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the community was famous for its historic Victorian homes, numerous antique shops, and art galleries, similar to Mendocino on the northern California coast. It had over 950 designated historic buildings, many in the area between the Gulf and Hwy. 90.



Unlike the neighboring community of Biloxi, the community only had one casino located in its Bay.

Katrina Impacts

The City had a population of 8,209 and 3,817 housing units at the time of the 2000 census, many in small historic homes in the area between Hwy. 90 and the Gulf.

Of its 950 historic buildings, over 400 were destroyed by high winds of the Hurricane coupled with a storm surge of over 30 feet.

“Katrina was our tsunami.”
Bay St. Louis resident

Impacts to City facilities were significant, with the historic City Hall flooded to a depth of four feet.

Katrina’s storm surge destroyed housing and stores in the blocks adjacent to the Gulf, as well as near the Bay. A RAND report estimates that, in all, 92% of the housing units were damaged, with 22% suffering “severe” damage from the storm surge, high winds, flooding, and rain (source: RAND: Technical Report TR-511).

As of February 2008, driving through the coastal areas reveals sidewalks and driveways leading to only remnants of foundations or lots completely cleared even of their foundations and driveways.

At the time of the 2000 census, the median price of a home in this area was \$92,400. That has since declined due to the combination of the current mortgage crisis and costs of flood insurance in the new “V” zones on the Flood Insurance Maps.

The City's Recovery

Immediately after the Hurricane struck, the City began to repair its basic infrastructure. The historic City Hall was flooded to a depth of 4 feet. The staff temporarily moved into trailers supplied by FEMA. However, the City was able to successfully purchase an office building for only \$3.8 million (plus the FEMA trailers) that had been for sale for \$10 million prior to the disaster. The City repaired flooding damage to this newly purchased facility.

Because of this expense and losses to the City's property and sales tax revenues that could not support the salaries of its 105 employees, the City has taken out a \$10 million loan.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposed program to "buyout" property that has suffered repeated flood losses is discussed on page 7.



Highway 90 was heavily damaged as a result of Katrina. The bridge over the bay leading to Pass Christian had just been rebuilt and re-opened at the time of the visit.



Unrepaired damage in historic downtown, Bay St. Louis

Preserving History in Reconstruction

FEMA inspectors were integral in determining which homes were saved and repaired versus which were torn down. The inspector evaluated the building in terms of percent damage. (This system is slightly different than in California, where the building inspector mutual aid system will be used.) If the home is in a flood zone on the FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) as zone A or V, the home needs to be elevated, a process that can be prohibitive for heavily damaged homes. Funds for the repairs of damaged homes are coming from the Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History (MDAH).



"The people in New Orleans have been complaining about the money Mississippi has received for recovery. But they still have the French Quarter. We lost a large piece of our history." – Bay St. Louis Resident

Residents are also concerned by the lack of flood and wind insurance at affordable prices, particularly since the rates for condos are significantly lower. They are concerned that neighborhoods that had been populated by historic homes will be overtaken by condos.

What Happened to the Retail?

The common perception among those that have studied disaster recovery is that the large chain retail stores and banks will have the capacity to lead the return of neighborhood shopping areas and downtowns. This has not been the case in either New Orleans or the Gulf Coast area. Some large national chains have decided not to rebuild at this time given the extent of devastation. Small businesses often do not have the resources to return. The lack of retail in the impacted areas is almost more shocking than the extent of housing damage.

City of BILOXI – Mississippi

History of the Community

Biloxi was established by French settlers in 1699. It was the first capital of the Louisiana Territory. Six flags have flown over the resort community of Biloxi – France, Spain, Great Britain, the West Florida Republic, the Confederacy, and the United States.

Large antebellum summer homes lined the coastal highway, the most famous of which was Beauvoir, the summer home and last residence of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, built in 1853. A large number of historic commercial structures and smaller homes completed the feeling of a genteel southern resort City.



One of several casinos on the Gulf Coast in Biloxi

When gambling was first legalized in Mississippi in 1990, the City led the way in casino development, having a total of ten casinos prior to Hurricane Katrina. Thus, tourism, particularly gaming-based tourism, is integral to the City's tax base.

City revenues from natural gas taxes, property taxes, sales tax, and gambling taxes support the City's 728 employees.

After the Mayor saw the impact of the four hurricanes to hit the Florida coast in 2004, together with the near-miss of Hurricane Ivan, he made the decision to purchase a \$10 million business continuity insurance package, basically an insurance policy against the loss of gambling income. The amount of the policy is roughly a six-month replacement of receipts from the City's casinos.

Katrina Impacts

The City had a population of 50,644 and 22,155 housing units at the time of the 2000 census.

Many of those in the City did not comply with the mandatory evacuation order, in spite of the Mayor's plea to evacuate, explaining, on television, that the storm would be worse than Camille. As a result, over 50 people died. The death toll would have been worse if the storm had made landfall at night, rather than during the day when stranded people could be located and rescued.

All of the casinos were impacted. Two of them have no plans to re-open. Extensive damage to Highway 90, the main road along the Gulf Coast, further delayed recovery. In particular, the Hwy. 90 bridge across Biloxi Back Bay leading to Ocean Springs did not re-open until early 2008.

Impacts to City facilities were significant, with the City losing 17 of its facilities.

Katrina's storm surge had a large impact on the housing in this community, as well. Both the areas adjacent to the Gulf, as well as those near the Back Bay, were impacted. A RAND report estimates that, in all, 55% of the housing units were damaged, with 29% suffering "severe" damage from the storm surge, high winds, flooding, and rain (source: RAND: TR-511).



As of February 2008, a drive along Hwy. 90 was eerie, with sidewalks and driveways leading to remnants of foundations or lots completely cleared.

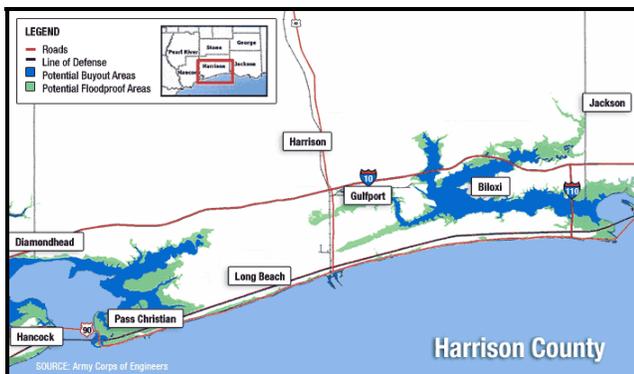
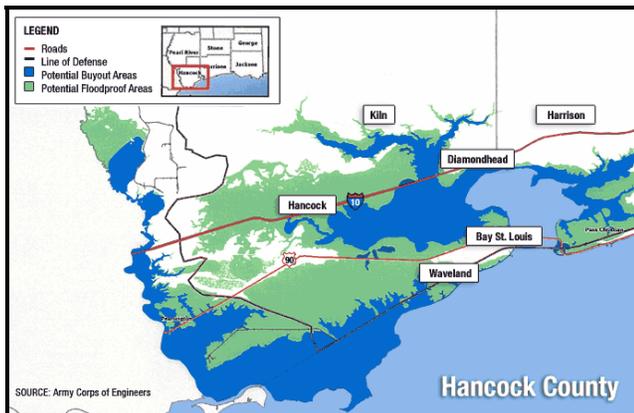
The City's Recovery

City revenues have not been seriously disrupted due to the insurance policy purchased prior to the storm, enabling the City to retain its 728 employees. Sales tax revenues have dropped sharply due to the loss of restaurant and other retail. But after the initial losses in gambling revenues for the first few months following the Hurricane, those gambling revenues have actually increased.

At the time of the 2000 census, the median price of a home in this area was \$92,600.

Average monthly rents in the Gulfport-Biloxi Metropolitan Area increased more than 20% while total employment dropped by 22% in the 12 months following the storm (source: RAND TR-511). In addition, as has been typical in California disasters, multifamily housing has been slower to recover than single-family homes.

The City is struggling to redefine itself given the extensive damage to many of its historic structures and museums. But progress on rebuilding is occurring. The Jefferson Davis home, for example, is scheduled to reopen in June 2008.



The Federal "Buyout" Offer

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has recently offered to buy properties that have been repeatedly flooded by hurricanes in 1947, 1969 (Camille), and 2005 (Katrina) in all of the communities along the Gulf Coast in Mississippi. The program, coordinated with FEMA, is the most ambitious program ever of its type – involving 17,000 properties at a cost of \$40 billion. This proposal has highlighted the conflict between the desire to rebuild as quickly as possible and the desire to ensure that damage in future disasters is less severe.

Several land owners have been tempted by the offer, in part because they have rebuilt in the past only to have had their homes destroyed again. But many others are opposed to the offer because they feel it would be the end of several of the small communities on the coast. The offer seemed too late for those who have already invested in rebuilding and they are concerned that their neighborhood will no longer be viable.

A.J. Holloway, the Mayor of Biloxi, speaks for those supporting the program by noting that "some sort of action is probably appropriate. These properties seem to get flooded in every major storm."

Jim Thriffiley, the President of the Bay St. Louis City Council, as well as other elected officials in some other neighboring communities, are much less supportive.

While conceptually sound, the "buyout" program is considered problematic for several reasons:

1. The maps are being presented at public meetings with little notice and no opportunity for public feedback.
2. The maps were prepared by the Corps of Engineers, an organization with credibility problems at the present time due to the levee failures in New Orleans.
3. Some city officials and staff are concerned that the "buyouts" will create a patchwork of vacant lots and homes that will be significantly more expensive to provide city services (such as street maintenance and water) for than the previous development pattern.
4. Some are concerned that the buy-out offer has devalued properties and that some developers are waiting for these properties to drop in value to purchase them for more than the Corps and FEMA offer and build high-rise condos similar to those in Florida. The "condo-ization" of the Gulf Coast and loss of the previous feeling of relaxed southern charm is a fear of many residents.

Town of DAUPHIN ISLAND – Alabama

HISTORY – Why It's Built on an Island

The Town of Dauphin Island became one of the first European settlements in the Louisiana Territory when the French settled on the island in the early 1700s. It was originally named "Massacre Island" because of a large number of human skeletons found by the original explorers in 1699. Because the original name seemed too ominous, the French renamed it Dauphin Island after the son of King Louis XIV.

The island remained largely military for the next 200 years because of its strategic location just outside the western side of Mobile Bay. Dauphin Island switched from French to British to Spanish and finally to American control in 1813. Fresh from the War of 1812, the Americans determined that it needed a fort in this area and began construction of Fort Gaines on the eastern tip of the island. The fort played a key role in the Battle for Mobile Bay in the Civil War – the battle in which Union Admiral Farragut famously said, "Damn the torpedoes. Full speed ahead."

The island had few permanent residents because of its location four miles south of the mainland across a body of water that was too deep for a road and too shallow for a ferry.

When a bridge was finally built, it was financed by the Mobile Chamber of Commerce who subdivided and sold off parcels to pay for the bridge!

The project, however, led to a uniquely complex set of owners. The western beach is owned by the Dauphin Island Property Owners' Association, while the eastern beach is owned by the this Association, the Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board, the Coast Guard, and others. The Town of Dauphin Island incorporated in 1988, but it does not own any of the beach – or any land. While the Town supplies police and fire services, a separate Water and Sewer Board supplies these utilities.

The original homes built during the 1950s look like standard small ranch homes and cottages. However, during the 1970s, much of the development was elevated for flood protection. Even the current Town Hall, constructed in 1979 by the volunteer fire department, is on pilings and elevated.

Katrina's Impacts

The small 14-mile long island community had 1,371 permanent residents and 1,691 housing units, based on the 2000 census. This number is probably low since in 2003 the island experienced a building boom resulting in an additional 200 homes and 600 condo units. The town's population peaks in the summer with an influx of tourists at about 5,000 people.

Katrina had a huge impact on the housing of this community. The western portion of the island is a sand spit. In this area, approximately 300 homes disappeared and an additional 150 were so badly damaged that they were torn down. (Even the land for about 50 of these homes is now under water.) Finally, a condo tower under construction was so badly damaged that it, too, had to be torn down. The eastern portion of the island is wider and contains a coastal forest. Approximately 300 homes suffered significant flood damage. These flooded homes are largely owned by permanent residents, while the other homes on the western sand spit were owned as investment property, second homes, and rentals.

This area has relatively inexpensive housing for a coastal community. Before Katrina, a home on the beach typically sold for about \$800,000, while one inland sold for \$175,000 to \$250,000.

A combination of Katrina and the current mortgage crisis has significantly dropped property values to roughly half their pre-Katrina value.

Katrina moved land. It washed out the main east-west road across the island. The park on the central-west portion of the island had sand up to the top of the picnic pavilions. The ferry landing on the eastern tip of the island was filled in to the point of not being functional, yet, after being dredged, it had a much smaller amount of sand than existed prior to the storm. Fort Gaines was covered in five feet of mud.



The Town's Recovery Effort

Town revenues from natural gas taxes, property taxes, a small sales tax on limited retail, and an even smaller "bed" tax have allowed the Town to employ approximately 40 full-time people. The Town was concerned that the loss of some housing and the damage to other housing would significantly impact its budget revenues. However, it turns out that the tax rate for "raw land" without a building is significantly higher than for "investment property" with a building, enabling the Town to maintain its property tax base after Katrina. The Town had a reserve fund that has been eliminated, however, due to the extra costs of hurricane recovery.

The perception of rebuilding is different, depending on who you talk with. Residents see significant construction on the eastern portion of the island and assume that much of the housing has been rebuilt. Town staff sees many homes that have not yet been completely repaired, particularly those that experienced flooding, as well as the homes that were washed away not being rebuilt, and say that rebuilding has been painfully slow.

Insurance is expensive. Flood insurance for a typical home on the eastern wooded section for \$250,000 is about \$2900/year, and wind storm damage from the Alabama Insurance Underwriters Association (an insurance company pool) for about \$6000/year for about \$350,000 – without content coverage.

The rebuilding effort has been delayed, in part, because the road on the western portion of the island was destroyed along with the homes. People could not begin to rebuild until the road was repaired. The road repair was significantly delayed because there are three owners. The bridge leading to Dauphin Island is a State Highway. Once you leave the southern end of the bridge the road ownership transfers to the Town of Dauphin Island until it intersects a Federal Highway running east and west the entire length of the island.

The Town continues to try to encourage elevating existing homes. Some residents of brick homes have even expressed interest in elevating their homes. However, with the cost of elevating such a home running about \$100,000, and the cost of rebuilding running about \$100,000 – such a decision doesn't make much economic sense! On the other hand, many of the older wood-frame homes are now being elevated.

"All of the publicity has been about New Orleans and the Mississippi Coast. We are being ignored and we have lost so much." – Dauphin Island Resident

Coastal Erosion and Mitigation

Coastal erosion is a serious long-term concern. Approximately fifty lots on the south-western portion of the island are now under water in the Gulf. Erosion on the south-eastern portion of the island, a bird sanctuary, is an equivalent problem, with the current shoreline approximately 2000 feet further inland than it was about 50 years ago.



Tree die-off due to sand erosion in Audubon Park

Various studies indicate that an engineered beach is the solution. However, at a cost of \$25 million, this is not a project that can be undertaken by the Town given current budgeting. FEMA mitigation grants top at \$3 million, only a small percentage of the funds needed to construct the engineered beach.

Katrina caused more problems than previous hurricanes to the Fort and beaches, making the construction of such an engineered beach a priority for the community.

The Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board, which owns the Fort the public beach, a campground, a pier, and other facilities, has not yet received any FEMA funding for Katrina damage because, for the first time since the Board was created in 1953, FEMA initially ruled that the Board was "private" and not an eligible recipient (even though it is administered by a Board that is appointed by Mobile County and approved by the Alabama Governor). This FEMA ruling was completely unexpected because the Board had previously been a recipient of FEMA grants. FEMA even told the Board that it would have to repay all of the previous grants it received to repair damage from previous storms. Thus, the Board has spent months appealing a FEMA ruling denying that it is an eligible applicant for FEMA grants. It has won the first of two separate appeals, but the process has been painful and delayed repairs and mitigation. Some speculate that FEMA was trying to also avoid a claim for \$4 million in damages to the Fort due to Hurricane Ivan.



Former City Hall – Pass Christian, Mississippi

LESSONS FOR THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA –

While preparing this document, several people were asked the most valuable piece of advice they would have for elected officials in the Bay Area. The most sage advice is to heed the words that some have attributed to baseball pitcher Satchel Paige:

“Be sure and know where you are headed, because if you don’t change direction, you will end up there.”

ROLE FOR REGIONAL COORDINATION

The States of Mississippi and Louisiana have had a leadership role in the coordination of long-term recovery because federal funds have been awarded to the governors of each of these states, rather than to the cities.

What, if any, is the role of ABAG or other regional forums for coordination of long-term recovery, particularly in relation to the State of California?

How can ABAG’s Regional Planning Committee and the FOCUS process play a role in developing regional recovery planning principles and priorities that are designed to be adaptable in a variety of disasters to speed recovery?

COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

All of the impacted local governments have been taking a renewed interest in comprehensive planning following the disaster and re-envisioning what they want their cities to be like.

ABAG and this region’s local governments can look at what we now know will likely be damage in future earthquakes to “soft-story” multifamily housing, as well as downtown areas of unreinforced masonry buildings. What is the balance between (a) focusing on mandating seismic retrofitting of these existing hazardous buildings – or, (b) assuming they are not fixed, envisioning how these heavily damaged areas should be rebuilt?

AVOIDANCE OF HAZARDOUS AREAS IN REBUILDING

After Hurricane Katrina, experts from throughout the country headed to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast and pointed out the basic flaws of building in these “obviously crazy” locations. It is likely that similar controversies and discussions will occur on how unwise it was for us to build in Earthquake Country. In addition, if there is a secondary disaster (such as large landslides along the fault causing the quake or a large post-earthquake firestorm), some neighborhoods may be extensively damaged or destroyed.

What role is there for a regional consensus-building on how to best manage such issues either before or after such a disaster? How would this region react if there were proposals for “buyouts” of some properties?

CREDITS – Prepared by Jeanne Perkins. **PHOTO CREDITS** – Jeanne Perkins. Data were collected from interviews with the A. J. Holloway (Mayor of Biloxi), Jim Thriffley (the President of the Bay St. Louis City Council), Joyce Allen (Town of Dauphin Island Project Director), Elaine Wilkinson (Gulf Regional Planning Commission Executive Director), and numerous unofficial interviews with various residents, government staff, and researchers in Katrina-impacted areas. However, the conclusions and generalizations of this paper are solely those of the author.