



VOLUME 3
chapter 4
THE COMMUNITY SPEAKS AND SHAPES THE PLAN

Successful city master plans are rooted in an understanding of the values, aspirations, and concerns of the communities whose future they are intended to guide. The City of New Orleans Master Plan benefitted from a conscious commitment to extensive public outreach and engagement. With an unusually short timeframe in which to produce the draft Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance, the planning process was intense and captured some of the momentum and frustration of the upsurge in community planning activism that followed Hurricane Katrina. In November, the success of a ballot initiative to amend the city charter and give the master plan and zoning ordinance formal legal standing prompted unusually high turnout at the previously scheduled round of public meetings.

The public process included a formal structure of committees whose members were appointed by the City Planning Commission, and then opened to volunteers, and informal opportunities for public engagement that included interviews and small focus groups, meetings with communities of interest (business, environment, historic preservation, Latino and Vietnamese organizations are examples), and guided tours of neighborhoods by members of the consulting team.

A Committee Structure

Community Advisory Group (CAG): The City Planning Commission invited a group representative of New Orleans' diversity to serve as a sounding board during the planning and zoning process. The CAG met about every 4–6 weeks from September, 2008 through May, 2009. Due to public interest, the CAG was later structured as an open group and occasionally joined by other community members as well. Following an established practice in master planning, the City Planning Commission also appointed knowledgeable professionals to two technical committees to advise the consulting team:

- **Planning Technical Advisory Committee (PTAC):** This group included the City Planning Commission's long-range planning committee (the Planning and Special Projects Committee) and other invited citizens, and met periodically with the consulting team throughout the Master Plan process.
- **Zoning Technical Advisory Committee (ZTAC):** Similarly recruited from the City Planning Commission's zoning subcommittee (the Zoning and Land Use Committee) and other invited citizens, the ZTAC advised the Master Plan consulting team throughout the Master Plan process.

Working Groups: The City Planning Commission invited groups of knowledgeable people from the public, private and non-profit sectors, including neighborhood representatives, to work with the consultant team on specific master plan and zoning topics. A working group was created to advise each section of the plan:

- **How We Live:** Neighborhoods, housing, historic preservation, green space, and human services
- **How We Prosper:** Economic development, jobs and workforce development
- **Sustainable Systems:** Transportation, infrastructure, environmental quality and sustainability
- **From Plan to Action:** Future land use, stewardship and citizen participation

B Public Outreach

Website. The Master Plan and Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance website—www.nolamasterplan.org—was used to make announcements about upcoming public events around the plan (visitors to the site have the opportunity to sign up for email updates and meeting reminders) as well as to share the results of meetings with the public. Summaries of all public meetings were posted, including presentation materials and synopses of public input. General plan information and background and reference materials such as maps and “Fact Sheets” were also available online. The website featured a series of questions inviting public response on many aspects of the plan. The results of public input via the



website are summarized below.

Comments from the website

Public comments received on the website have mirrored community concerns expressed in previous plans. The majority of comments received on the website have centered on preserving neighborhood character, including: preventing or mitigating unwanted land uses, preserving the historic character of neighborhoods and the historic assets throughout the city, preventing demolition of historic buildings and increasing the capacity of code enforcement mechanisms, and improving the overall appearance and condition of neighborhoods (*i.e.*, infrastructure repairs and streetscaping improvements).

Increasing opportunities for mixed-use development and higher densities where appropriate were issues that were also brought up a number of times. A large number of comments also centered on improving parks and recreational opportunities for all residents.

Transportation themes in online discussion posts centered on improving conditions for bike and pedestrian transportation, building new transportation infrastructure such as light rail and increasing bus service throughout the city.

Access to information on planning and public decision-making processes was also stressed. Providing continued opportunities for meaningful public participation was mentioned a number of times.

Press releases and press contacts. At key moments in the progression of the planning process, press

and media were notified of developments the Master Plan. Local news media highlighted several Planning events and issues in print and online publications.

Newsletters. Newsletters were used to publish project information and updates. They were handed out at public meetings and distributed throughout the city in public places and popular commercial locations (e.g., places of worship, drugstores, barber shops, etc.).

Event flyers. Each public meeting for the Master Plan was promoted by a flyer that was distributed at public places and key locations throughout the city.

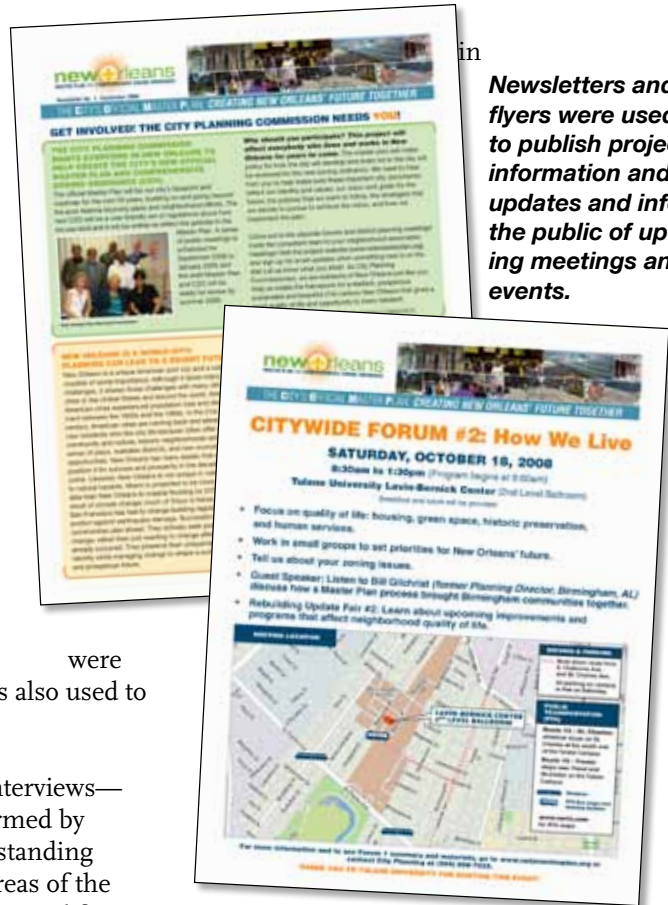
TV and radio. Throughout the planning process members of the planning team were interviewed on television and radio. Radio was also used to promote participation in the public meetings.

Interviews and focus groups. Dozens of interviews—one-on-one and in small groups—were performed by members of the planning team to gain understanding into current conditions and initiatives in all areas of the plan. Interview and focus group participants ranged from professionals and experts in various fields to grassroots organizers and advocacy group leaders.

Citywide forums. A series of four day-long citywide forums was held on Saturdays in the fall of 2008 to introduce the planning process to residents and to receive input into critical matters. The forums were held at a publicly-accessible location, each time in a different area of the city. Each had a theme and focused on a particular aspect of the plan (they are described in more detail below).

- **Forum 1:** “Creating a Vision for New Orleans’ Future Together,” was held on Saturday, September 27, 2008 at Xavier University. It introduced the purpose and scope of the Master Planning process to the residents of New Orleans. Participants offered input on the most important overarching priorities for the plan to address.
- **Forum 2:** “How We Live,” was held on Saturday, October 18, 2008, at Tulane University. The focus was issues surrounding quality of life: housing, green space, historic preservation, and human services.
- **Forum 3:** “Sustainable Systems,” was held on Saturday, November 8, 2008 at St. Maria Goretti Church in New Orleans East. The focus was on flood protection, environmental quality, transportation, infrastructure, and community facilities.
- **Forum 4:** “How We Prosper,” was held on Saturday, December 13, 2008 at Behrman Gym in Algiers, and focused on economic development, small business development, jobs and workforce development.
- **Forum 5:** “From Plan to Action” was held on Saturday, September 19, 2009 at Dryades YMCA in Central City to present the draft plan to the community, answer questions, receive input on the draft, and prepare community members for participation in the adoption process of the plan in the coming months.

Full summaries of all previous citywide forums, including a summary of community input, were available



in **Newsletters and flyers were used to publish project information and updates and inform the public of upcoming meetings and events.**

to the public on the project website (www.nolamasterplan.org).

District meetings. Two rounds of public meetings for the Master Plan were held in each planning district (in each round Districts 12 and 13 were combined into a single meeting and Districts 9, 10, and 11 were combined into a single meeting). Each planning district meeting presented key components of the plan and sought input from residents of that district on issues pertaining to their area of the city as well as issues pertaining to the city as a whole.

The first round of Planning District meetings took place November 10–13, 2008. These meetings presented residents with an overview of the plan and sought their input on what the plan’s top priorities should be.

The second round of Planning District meetings took place April 15–22, 2009. These meetings presented residents with an overview of the first draft of the plan (available on the project website in March, 2009) and provided opportunity for detailed discussion of and input into the draft Future Land Use Map.



Residents gave detailed feedback on draft versions of the Future Land Use Map to ensure that it reflected their neighborhood and future development vision.

Full summaries of all District meetings held to date, including a summary of community input, were available to the public at www.nolamasterplan.org.

C Public Review of the Master Plan

On March 20, 2009, the First Working Draft Master Plan was made public on the project website (www.nolamasterplan.org). Copies were also placed in libraries and other public locations. Copies of an expanded lay-friendly newsletter with highlights of the Draft Master Plan were distributed widely. The Draft received prominent media coverage and spurred a wave of enhanced public interest and communication via the project website, including requests for additional community meetings with various interest groups to promote understanding of the draft plan and provide opportunities for feedback on the draft. The consulting team implemented an expansive outreach effort in advance of the April round of District Meetings to review the Draft Plan. On March 21, 2009, leaders from neighborhood organizations and community groups attended an orientation to the Draft Master Plan, and were asked to discuss it with their members and constituents and to help encourage their participation in the forthcoming District Meetings. Civic leaders in various sectors were also given briefings on the Draft Plan throughout the city.



On September 15, 2009, in advance of the fifth citywide forum, a second draft of the plan was also made available for public review, again with significant outreach efforts to make the community aware of the draft and assist community members in

MASTER PLAN PROCESS

This project is funded through the Louisiana Recovery Authority by federal funds (D-CDBG).

Elements of the Master Plan			
PLAN SECTIONS Each chapter will include goals and policies, community issues, current conditions, strategies to achieve the goals, implementation plan	COMMUNITY INPUT	WORKING GROUPS	COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP
A PLAN FOR 21ST CENTURY NEW ORLEANS Population and Land Use Trends Community Participation Vision and Principles	Citywide Forum 1: "Sept. 27, 2008 Previous Plans Citywide Forums Planning District Meetings Interviews and focus groups Recovery Plans and Neighborhood Plans Meetings with neighborhood and citywide organizations	Goals, Policies and Strategies Discussion Review of Draft Plan elements	Community Advisory Group Policy Discussion and Review of Draft Plan
HOW WE LIVE Housing and Neighborhoods Historic Preservation Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Human Services	Citywide Forum 2: "How We Live": Oct. 18, 2008 Planning District Meetings Interviews and focus groups Recovery Plans and Neighborhood Plans Meetings with neighborhood and citywide organizations	How We Live Working Group Goals, Policies and Strategies Discussion Review of Draft Plan elements	
HOW WE PROSPER Economic Development: Business, jobs, and workforce development	Citywide Forum 4: "How We Prosper": Dec. 13, 2008 Planning District Meetings Interviews and focus groups Recovery Plans and Neighborhood Plans Meetings with neighborhood and citywide organizations	How We Prosper Working Group Goals, Policies and Strategies Discussion Review of Draft Plan elements	
SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS Community Facilities and Services Transportation Infrastructure Environmental Quality and Hazard Mitigation	Citywide Forum 3: "Sustainable Systems": Nov. 8, 2008 Planning District Meetings Interviews and focus groups Recovery Plans and Neighborhood Plans Meetings with neighborhood and citywide organizations	Sustainable Systems Working Group Goals, Policies and Strategies Discussion Review of Draft Plan elements	
FROM PLAN TO ACTION Future Land Use Plan Stewardship and Citizen Participation Program Implementation Systems	Citizen Participation Summit Neighborhood group and stakeholder meetings Planning District Meetings Interviews and focus groups Recovery Plans and Neighborhood Plans Meetings with neighborhood and citywide organizations	Future Vision Working Group Goals, Policies and Strategies Discussion Review of Draft Plan elements	
INFORMS			
COMPREHENSIVE ZONING ORDINANCE	All Citywide Forums Neighborhood Meetings Planning District Meetings Interviews and focus groups Recovery Plans and Neighborhood Plans	Zoning Working Group	Community Advisory Group: Review zoning concepts.



Four citywide forums and twenty district meetings were held throughout the city to gather public input at critical stages of the planning process. The planning team also met with hundreds of neighborhood, advisory and interest groups throughout the planning process.



COMMON THEMES FROM CITYWIDE FORUMS AND PLANNING DISTRICT MEETINGS

HOW WE LIVE

Improve public safety and prevent crime.

- > Crime affects the viability of all other redevelopment efforts.
- > Criminal justice system needs to be improved.
- > Provide better alternatives for at-risk youth.

Preserve neighborhood character.

- > Control the quality of new development to fit with existing character.
- > Preserve the diversity of neighborhoods: physical/aesthetic as well as sociocultural.

Encourage a more holistic concept of historic preservation.

- > Historic preservation should be people- and culture-centered/ Don't "museum-ify" the city.
- > Preservation should benefit residents, not just tourists.
- > Preserve cultural heritage and the arts.
- > Historic character includes mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods, corner stores, and public transit.

HOW WE PROSPER

Expand and improve workforce development programs for all residents.

- > Tourism industry is seen as important but not offering enough opportunities for advancement.

Provide neighborhood-oriented commerce

- > Supermarkets are especially lacking in many parts of the city.
- > Corner stores are beloved in many neighborhoods, but also seen as problematic...

SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

Safety from hurricanes/flooding should be an overarching priority.

Expand public transit.

Expand opportunities for bike and pedestrian transportation.

FROM PLAN TO ACTION

Ensure meaningful opportunities for public participation in development processes and city budgeting.

Improve the transparency and accountability of public officials and public processes.

