

CAMELOT ON THE COAST: THE COMMISSION ON RECOVERY, REBUILDING AND RENEWAL

“Absolutely it is essential that we end up with something better than what we lost,” exclaimed Andres Duany, leader of the Mississippi Renewal Forum’s architectural team. With the goal of developing “a broad vision for a better Gulf Coast and South Mississippi”, the Governor’s Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal kicked off its efforts with the Mississippi Renewal forum, held October 12-17. A wealth of ideas and a spreading enthusiasm for the possibilities that lie ahead were outcomes of the forum.

A beachfront park in Long Beach with single- and multi-family housing nearby, a fishing village in Biloxi’s Back Bay, and a raised, walled viaduct for truck and rail lines in Gulfport were among the proposals discussed. Sketches of possible designs for the eleven coastal towns and cities were drawn up by teams of architects and engineers from across the nation, and brought to a series of town hall meetings. (These sketches, along with brief write-ups, are available at www.mississippirenewal.com.)

The Commission’s Final Report Due in December

The Governor’s Commission, which is coordinating planning efforts and is the force behind the Renewal Forum, seeks to “give local leaders access to ideas and information that will help them decide what their region will look like five, ten, even twenty or thirty years from now”. (See the following website: www.governorscommission.com.) The decisions on implementation will be made by local officials and private investors almost exclusively.

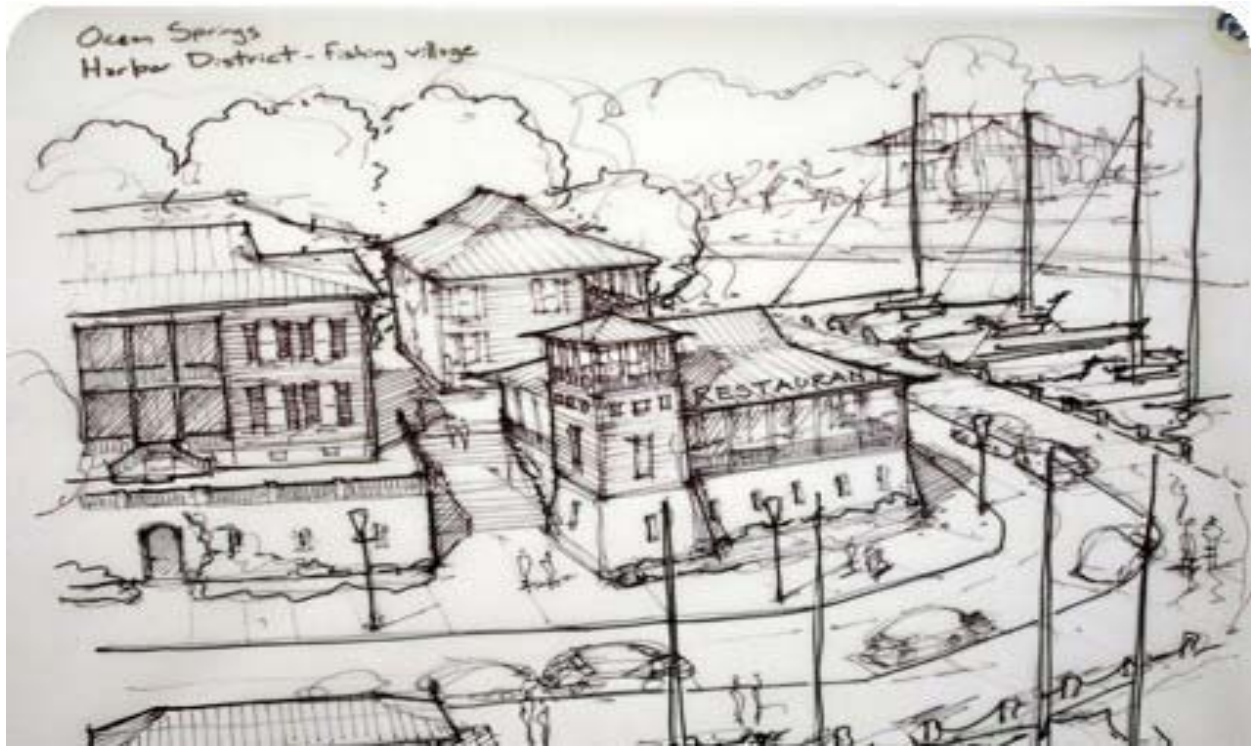
The Commission is made up of 22 committees: nine devoted to issues from infrastructure to health and human services; eight that are geographically-based (counties or multi-county units); and five government-oriented advisory committees (Congress,

House, Senate, County and Municipal committees). The county and regional committees are convening a series of open, town hall-type meetings, while the other committees are focusing on specific areas. Jim Barksdale, former CEO of Netscape Communications and now CEO of Barksdale Management Corporation, was chosen by Governor Haley Barbour to head the Commission. The Commission’s final report, due by the end of 2005, will “summarize the best ideas for rebuilding these communities and present a broad vision for renewal”, enabling local decision makers to decide among ideas and possibilities. The Commission is funded by private donations, and government funding is not accepted.

Designs for Coast Include Visions of National Team

The Mississippi Renewal Forum October 11-17 was an unprecedented effort, according to the website of the Chicago-based Congress for the New Urbanism, which organized the team. Over 100 professionals with expertise in environmental protection, road and transit planning, social issues, economic development, and the design of residences, neighborhoods, and town centers were part of the effort. Led by Miami architect-planner Andres Duany, the team took six and a half days to produce planning materials and architectural designs for the rebuilding process. While some of the expenses of the charrettes (or participatory planning workshops) were covered in part by a grant from the Knight Foundation, the professionals donated time or worked at greatly reduced rates.

The teams created neighborhood-based plans, simplified codes and approval procedures for buildings, and designed low-cost buildings of character “that can be built quickly but retained for permanent use.” There were also designs for redeveloping land once occupied by blighted or vacated



Sketch of possible Ocean Springs Harbor District from the Mississippi Renewal Forum team.

commercial strips into walkable districts, “echoing older and loved parts of the communities.” Plans also offered examples of how to integrate land-based casinos into the rebuilt towns. Websites with more information are provided below.

Information on the Governor’s Commission and the Mississippi Renewal Forum presented here was found at their official websites www.governorscommission.com and www.mississippirenewal.com.

Official websites on rebuilding the Mississippi Gulf Coast:

www.governorsthegulfcoast.com, website of Governor’s Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal.

www.mississippirenewal.com website with information coming out of the Renewal Forum and also up-to-date information on the Governor’s Commission in the newsletter “Rebuilding the Coast”.

www.rebuildingthegulfcoast.gov provides a way for US businesses to register at several government websites, and provides a central point for exchange of information about the rebuilding process. The Hurricane Contracting Information Center is here.

www.whitehouse.gov gives information about President Bush’s initiatives.

Websites on the New Urbanism and Mississippi:

www.cnu.org

www.smartgrowth.org

www.newurbanismnews.com

Other websites with ideas/information on rebuilding the state’s Gulf Coast:

www.activeliving.org/index.php/Post+Katrina+Development/141 provides a list of organizations (and their websites) working to assist Gulf Coast communities in rebuilding according to healthy community designs, from The National Recreation and Parks Association to the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

Several local and national organizations, from the Red Cross (www.redcross.org) through the Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org) to the Sierra Club (www.sierraclub.org/gulfcoast) have projects in progress on the Coast.

Also, www.stateline.org, funded by the Pew Charitable Trust, provides up-to-date state by state news on hurricane-related developments. Smaller, new organizations have sites, such as the Women’s Equity in Rebuilding Coalition (www.womenwerc.org) and New Orleans’Rebuild Green (www.rebuildgreen.org). A blog that has it all is www.hurricane-katrina.org.