

Re-Newing New Orleans: A Look at Why New Urbanism is the Key to Rebuilding New Orleans

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The widespread destruction of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina represents a unique opportunity to rebuild the public infrastructure and residential landscape of a major city on a different set of principles for urban planning and design. This exploratory article reviews the social and demographic condition of the city of New Orleans before and after the national disaster, presents new urbanism as a potential framework for urban renewal, and provides a case study of the Hill District in Pittsburgh as a model for local policymakers.

“We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did.” So spoke Representative Richard H. Baker, a ten-term Republican from Baton Rouge, regarding the unique opportunity he – along with many other Louisianans – feels has been presented due to the catastrophic devastation that resulted from Hurricane Katrina.¹ New Orleans has always been hailed as one of America's most distinctive, romantic, and beloved cities in terms of culture, history, and spirit. Yet, the sobering reality too often lost in the midst of the excitement, vibrancy, and zest of America's city of indulgence is that New Orleans has been declining in both relative and absolute terms since the 1960s. Further, little was being done in the years before Katrina to turn the city around or to protect it from ultimate disaster.

Kennedy School of Government professor Edward Glaser painted a dire picture of the state of pre-Katrina New Orleans in a September 2005 panel discussion, describing New Orleans as “an expensive locale with a mediocre climate and a history of terrible government” whose population has declined almost ten percent (or by forty thousand people) between 2000 and 2004.² Before the storm, high poverty levels, racial discrimination, housing affordability constraints, education inequalities, and crime plagued the city. Almost thirty percent of the New Orleans population was at or below the national poverty line and nearly one-fifth of New Orleanians received food stamps totaling over \$101 million every year.³ Thirty-one percent of New Orleans African American families – compared with five percent of white families – were below the poverty line and nearly all public housing residents were African American.⁴ In 2000, New Orleans was one of the nation's ten most segregated metropolitan areas and one of the five lowest-ranked cities for decline in segregation between 1980 and 2000.⁵

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In terms of housing affordability, while the median income of New Orleans homes in 2000 was a mere \$27,133 and the median income for a family \$32,338 (the per capita income for the city as a whole was \$17,258),⁶ the median house value was \$87,300, the median rent asked for vacant units was \$380, and the median gross rent in New Orleans was \$488.⁷ The metropolitan region's fair market rents \$578 for a one bedroom unit and \$676 for a two-bedroom unit were put into perspective in a National Low Income Housing Coalition 2004 report which explained that these numbers "far exceed the means of low-income residents" in that "a worker earning the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 would need to work 100 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom unit at fair market rent."⁸ As for education, New Orleans, like most major U.S. cities, had a largely segregated public school system pre-Katrina that was the direct result of largely segregated residential patterns. Sixty-five percent of New Orleans public schools in 2004 did not meet the state's standards—an especially disturbing statistic when one also considers that New Orleans' central city school district had the largest African American enrollment in the country (almost ninety-three percent) among such schools.⁹ Crime statistics are equally startling in that while the U.S. crime index in 2003 was 329.7, New Orleans scored well above the national average with a 575.3.¹⁰ After a decade of steady improvement from being the country's murder capital in 1993, the city's homicide rate had climbed to nearly ten times the national average, a phenomenon officials attribute to public apathy, racial division, and a dysfunctional court system.¹¹ So whether one believes that the devastation of (and after) Hurricane Katrina represented providential interference—as Representative Baker suggests—or simply a man-made disaster caused by faulty levees, one must concede that New Orleans was clearly a city in dire need of rebuilding even before the Katrina disaster. A big part of the problem faced by those now attempting to rebuild New Orleans is the bifurcated nature of the city both socially and geographically. At the mouth of the hurricane-prone Gulf of Mexico and surrounded by the Mississippi River to the south, Lake Borgne to the east, and Lake Ponchartrain to the north, New Orleans was a disaster waiting to happen.

Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005 (the eye of the storm passing within ten to fifteen miles of New Orleans) and ripped through New Orleans with power, timing, and placement that were perfectly wrong. The city—which should have suffered from heavy rains and strong winds downing trees—was left drowning in its own engineering disaster when the 17th Street, Industrial, and London Avenue canals were breached. Built solely to avert flooding, these three levees failed, filling seventy-five percent of the city with rushing water reaching a depth of twenty-five feet in some neighborhoods.¹²

As a result of the event, which has been referred to as the "largest civil engineering disaster in the history of the United States," more than thirteen hundred plus people lost their lives,¹³ around two thousand residents are still deemed missing,¹⁴ and hundreds of thousands of families have been displaced (Van Heerden 2005, 176). In sum, three hundred and seventy-four thousand New Orleans residents became evacuees residing in temporary housing including shelters, hotels, the homes of friends and family, and FEMA trailers (Van Heerden 2005, 176). The estimated damages are now well into billions of dollars, climbing daily, and early estimates speculate that the disaster and its aftermath for

New Orleans will ultimately end up costing more than fifty billion dollars.¹⁵ And yet in the wake of the disaster—despite traumatizing personal experiences, extensive property damage, the devastation of St. Bernard and Orleans Parishes,¹⁶ and the desperate state the city was in even before the hurricane hit—fifty percent of the residents have made it clear that they have every intention of moving back to New Orleans and calling it home once again (Van Heerden 2005, 176). Consequently, the question on every New Orleans city planners' mind is where will *home* be and what will it be like?

The pressing issue of where to put returning New Orleans residents has become quite controversial. Katrina exposed the truth of New Orleans and, for that matter, of so many other American cities: neighborhoods segregated along lines of race and class and concentrated poverty within these areas due to decades of urban sprawl. New Orleans, however, is unique in terms of its sprawling in that the city itself was constructed on natural levees comprised of soft silt, clay, and sand sediments, which is the reason why the city has been sinking at a rate of about three feet every one hundred years.¹⁷ The city had nowhere to expand until engineer A. Baldwin Wood realized they could drain the back swamps surrounding New Orleans due to revolutionary improvements he had made on pumps and drainage techniques in the early twentieth century (Lewis 2003). As a result, the city expanded from the higher ground near the river and natural ridges and sprawled into former swamplands and flood-prone areas. In the post-war years, the metropolitan area was expanding into the newly drained swampland at such a rapid rate that the area of metropolitan New Orleans doubled in size between 1950 and 1975 (Lewis 2003, 76). The fear of racial integration being imposed on residents of the inner city resulted in another explosion of migration—a “white flight” into the suburbs in the 1960s. This resulted in the alienation of black and white populations; the introduction of newer, more homogeneous, less architecturally diverse neighborhoods; and, the decay of inner-city—mostly African American—neighborhoods and public services (Lewis 2003, 70).

Yet, with seventy-five to eighty percent of the city flooded, Katrina affected all segments of the population—both rich and poor. In looking at the quality and make-up of the land New Orleans rests on, it should come as no surprise there is a direct correlation between severity of flood damage in a given neighborhood and how low or high the land on which the area sits. When looking at maps, it appears that the portions of the city that were developed before 1900—like Old Carrollton, Uptown, the Old Warehouse District, the French Quarter, Old Marigny, Bywater Espanade Ridge, Bayou St. John, Gentilly Ridge—and those built from mid-twentieth century dredging—like the set of Lake Shore developments between Lake Ponchartrain and Robert E. Lee Boulevard—were initially built on substantially higher ground along the river front and natural ridges.

While these older and higher areas were spared from the serious devastation, the lower and more flood vulnerable region of the city the Metro area had the most catastrophic damage, predominantly due to the storm surge and flooding that was channeled by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (a fact that comes as little surprise given its low-land value and subsequent susceptibility to flooding).¹⁸ Out

of the three hundred and fifty-four thousand people who received moderate to severe damage in the disaster; nearly all were residents of this area which includes both St. Bernard and Orleans parishes.¹⁹ Seventy-five percent were black, twenty-nine percent lived below the poverty line, and more than ten percent were unemployed at the time of the storm. One of the hardest hit and poorest sections of New Orleans was the Lower Ninth Ward, which had flooding up to twenty feet high in its neighborhoods. This area, which according to the 2000 census had a poverty level of over thirty-six percent and half of its residents living on less than \$20,000 a year, was one of the last regions of the city to be developed due to its poor drainage system and its swampy land. Consequently, it became home to mainly poor African Americans and immigrant laborers who could not afford to live anywhere else. Yet, as previously stated, all socio-economic and racial groups were affected by the storm, as seen in the fact that while sixty-six percent of Orleans Parish residents were black, eighty-eight percent of the arguably harder hit St. Bernard Parish were white.²⁰ The unfortunate reality here, however, comes with the important difference that lies between “most affected” and “most able to recover”

a difference that reminds us not only of the situation of New Orleans’ poor population today but also the plight they faced before Katrina. So, while the hurricane and levees themselves may not have discriminated in that they destroyed everything in their paths, the disaster shed a very needed light on discrimination that was already present.

Maps and statistics regarding New Orleans reinforce the disturbing reality of the structure and conditions of the city pre-Katrina and force us all to recognize the implications that they have for not only the future of New Orleans but also the American city in a post-Katrina world. Concentrated poverty, racial segregation, and the discrimination that lies at the heart of urban sprawl are not unique problems and social phenomena of New Orleans but are unfortunately prevalent in most of America’s multiracial, socio-economically diverse metropolitan areas. Unfortunately, socio-economic and urban renewal cycles in cities usually take decades to bring about tangible results—gentrification and other evolutionary changes are gradual and take time. But New Orleans has a unique opportunity to “cheat” the cycle in rebuilding the city to accommodate the half million people who long for home. Of the many and varied options for rebuilding, the concept of “new urbanism” often comes to the forefront of discussion.

The History of New Urbanism and Possibilities for the Future of New Orleans

Originally, the concept of new urbanism came as the answer to the problem of urban sprawl. Most Americans know of the post World War II flight to the suburbs. Neighborhoods such as Levittown, New Jersey—America’s first true suburb—are more than just houses: they symbolize the changing socio-demographic layout of America in the early 1950s (Brownwell 1999, 8). The origins of the movement toward the suburbs can be traced even further back. Between 1900 and 1920, America saw car ownership skyrocket from eight thousand to eight million. Higher numbers of cars meant better road systems in and out of cities (Brownell 1999, 2). As cities became more crowded with both people

and cars, the suburbs seemed the perfect answer. Between 1950 and 1970, while the population of American cities collectively grew by ten million people, the suburbs of those cities grew by eighty-five million people (Brownell 1999, 3). The American dream flourished with larger houses and yards enclosed by white picket fences. Of course, the faces in the neighborhood were as white as the fences. Segregation occurred along lines of both race and class. Further, the movement of the middle and upper class to the periphery had a great impact economically on cities (Brownell 1999, 2). As money in forms of both consumer spending and the tax base moved away, downtown areas became increasingly destitute.

Of course “suburbia” has come with its own set of problems. Americans have become stuck in the car for a majority of their day-to-day errands. Architect and city planner Robert Davis puts this into perspective in stating, “we see this world through a windshield; we experience the public realm in a state of road rage” (Bressi 2002, 7). The notion of the “corner store” has changed into the mega-strip malls run by large corporations (Brownell 1999, 6). People no longer support the “mom and pop” stores of their neighbors and friends, but instead frequent Wal-Mart. Walking in and out of a business, people have become faceless and nameless. Interaction has become limited to, “paper or plastic?” Long commutes and a decreased sense of community has resulted in American families living in large houses yet feeling isolated. Cities, which had previously provided a more-conducive environment for social interaction, have become desolate and dangerous. The solution lies in changing the structure of neighborhoods themselves. Former Vice President Al Gore pinpoints the problems surrounding modern suburbia in a speech about the importance of city planning:

Many of our walkable main streets have emptied out and their small shops closed, one by one, leaving a night time vacuum for crime and disorder...The ill-thought-out sprawl, hastily developed around our nation’s cities, has turned what used to be friendly, easy suburbs into lonely cul-de-sacs... In many such developments, an absence of sidewalks, amenities, and green spaces discourages walking, bicycling, and planting...A livable suburb or city is one that lets us get home after work fast so we can spend more time with friends and family and less time stuck in traffic (Bressi 2002, 39).

For many progressive architects and developers, new urbanism is the model that holds the solution for many of the aforementioned problems with some of its proponents even going as far as to proclaim the movement as a potential panacea for some of America’s most problematic cities. According to urban social theorist Michael Bounds (2004), “the movement...confront(s) the contemporary problems that beset all our cities: problems of urban sprawl, crime, environmental degradation and alienation” the very issues that historically have haunted New Orleans (111). According to proponents, the new urbanism model accomplishes this through the “[promotion],...creation, and restoration of diverse, walkable, compact, vibrant, (and) mixed-use communities...” that include the “housing, work places, shops, entertainment, schools, parks, and civic facilities [that are] essential to the daily lives of the residents.”²¹

“Slowness,” inclusiveness, and boundaries are the three central values that lie at the heart of the new urbanism movement and the means through which new urbanists bring about a greater sense of community within the neighborhood (Bressi 2002, 25). *Slowness* is the notion that the neighborhood itself should be accessible and is accomplished by building the community up around a “city center” that can be reached via a five-minute walk from any given location. This layout fosters increased interaction between neighbors and consequently a stronger sense of community. The second value, *inclusiveness*, means bringing together groups of people from a variety of economic backgrounds, thus enabling neighborhoods to transcend divisions of race and class (Bressi 2002, 41). Lastly, new urbanism places great importance on neighborhoods having clearly defined *boundaries*. In theory, such borders give rise to a shared community identity—one that compels residents to become more personally invested in their neighborhood’s preservation (Bressi 2002, 25).

Along with these three central values, the new urbanism movement is guided by ten key principles, all of which would *ideally* be present in a truly new urbanist community. Neighborhoods, for starters, need to be *walkable*, with houses and businesses in close proximity of one another. Streets should be easily navigable and laid out so that they promote *connectivity* throughout the neighborhoods. Housing, businesses, and schools should all be constructed close to one another—and intermixed—so that any given area in a neighborhood is *mixed use* with people being able to work, shop, and live all in the same vicinity. *Mixed housing* should also be prevalent with a variety of housing types—condominiums, homes, and apartments—being available and affordable for a variety of household incomes. Homes, furthermore, should all reflect a similar architectural style—as outlined by the *quality architecture and urban design* principle—not only for aesthetics but also because it will visually give a community a shared identity. As stated previously, clearly defined neighborhood boundaries are also critical in that they promote a *traditional neighborhood structure*, which increases personal investment among residents in the community. *High density* is also a goal in these neighborhoods in that it is a more resourceful use of space and results in a greater number of residences, shops, and businesses available for locals—and within that five-minute walk of the city center. Public transit systems and other forms of *smart transportation* must also be created so that residents can travel throughout the city without such a heavy reliance on automobiles. *Sustainability* is another key aspect to the model and is achieved as a result of the minimal use of resources and impact on the surrounding environment that come from high density and walkability. Ultimately, new urbanist theory holds that if these principles are implemented in a community, a *higher quality of life* will emerge as a result—a quality that will enable people of varying backgrounds to come together both to work and to live (Bressi 2002, 25).

When one takes these principles and considers them in the context of New Orleans, the new urbanism movement appears to touch upon some ideas and improvements that could very well have an important impact in the city’s reconstruction. For one, new urbanism’s focus on high density and self-sustainable communities that maximize space and place less pressure on natural resources are especially important in a city like New Orleans. In rebuilding, developers are going to have to finally ac-

cept and respect that it is dangerous for New Orleans to continue to sprawl out onto the drained swamp land that surrounds the city and that high density – like it or not – is part of New Orleans’ future. Furthermore, planners are going to have to come to terms with the fact that – even though the city’s resources are depleted and many areas need funds for reconstruction – a majority of the city’s money is going to have to be invested into developing and constructing stronger levees for the sub-sea level city.²² Pre-Katrina, seventy-seven percent of New Orleans workers traveled by car, truck, van, or motorcycle to work every morning with an average commute time of twenty-six minutes for commuters with their own means of transportation and forty-six minutes for those who depended on public transportation.²³ By decreasing commute times and promoting community living, new urbanism’s mixed use neighborhoods would allow people to live and work in a closer vicinity and result in less pollution from high traffic and more time for people to spend with their families.

Furthermore, more advanced, smarter forms of transportation are also going to need to be a priority in post-Katrina New Orleans – forms that cover more routes than the three streetcar lines (the St. Charles line, the Riverfront line, and the Canal Street line) and bus routes that put those who rely on public transport at such an obvious disadvantage.²⁴ Architecturally speaking, new urbanism’s quality architecture and urban design principle would fit well in a city like New Orleans known for its memorable streetscapes and distinctive historic neighborhoods, each of which stylistically reflect a particular culture – whether it be French, Spanish, Caribbean, or African – and style – whether it be the creole cottages and townhouses in Esplanade Ridge, the California-style bungalows of Gentilly Terrace, or the raised center-hall villas found in the Garden District.²⁵ Andres Duany – the mastermind behind the new urban “beta test” community of Seaside, Florida and guru of the movement – sees much of this potential for New Orleans. Despite being a “very complicated place, very unique,” he feels it is one that “must be preserved at all cost,” and, like Representative Richard Baker, sees New Orleans as having an “unprecedented opportunity to do something about (the) many problems it had.”²⁶

And yet, despite Duany’s optimism and the promise that many see when they apply the principles of new urbanism to a post-Katrina New Orleans, many detractors of new urbanism are convinced that the movement’s theoretically perfect neighborhoods are nothing more than unreasonable (and somewhat naïve) ideals. Alex Krieger, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design believes that new urbanism actually reinforces many of the problems facing American cities in that it creates even more isolated, inward-looking subdivisions and neighborhoods within the larger city (Bressi 2002, 51). Furthermore, Krieger feels that these communities by design are flawed in that they make themselves vulnerable to outside influences from the start by relying solely on private management and placing complete control of their neighborhoods in the hands of developers who may not have the community’s best interests at heart. Other detractors simply feel that new urbanism fails to offer innovative solutions to the problems of loss of community and decaying inner city areas in that the movement focuses too much on building new communities and not enough on investing in and fixing the old (Bressi 2002, 51).

While each of these detractors make compelling arguments, one of the most convincing arguments against—and seemingly insurmountable problems of—new urbanism emerges when one realizes how high the cost of living is in existing new urbanist communities. Homes sell for an average of \$400,000 in Seaside, Florida, \$450,000 in Laguna West, California, and an astonishing \$600,000 in the Kentlands in Washington D.C. (Brownell 1999, 65). Detractor Michael Bounds (2004) makes his disdain for the movement clear in regards to housing prices, asserting that “there is no mystery about for whom this new urbanism is built. The design styles distill the most traditional social assumptions of gender, class, and race... The past evoked [by Seaside] is the narrowest and most elitist of the founding fantasies” (200). When put in the context of a city like New Orleans, where the median house value, according to 2000 census data, was \$87,300 and the median household income was a mere \$27,133, one cannot help but appreciate Bounds’ frustrations and question how viable new urbanism could really be for returning hurricane-displaced residents of varying socioeconomic status. Some would even go as far as to describe the notion as naïve and impossible. A recent article in the *Boston Globe* places this problem into perspective:

Before the storm, more than four of 10 poor blacks in New Orleans lived in neighborhoods that were 40 percent or more poor... The city was among a very few in America where *racial segregation actually worsened during the 1990s*...An extensive body of social science research concludes that racially segregated and high-poverty communities undermine the life chances of families and children, cutting off access to mainstream social and economic opportunities. We must avoid re-segregating New Orleans's poor and minority residents in isolated and distressed neighborhoods. (Emphasis added).²⁷

Another popular argument of new urbanism detractors comes from those who feel that these communities by design would in fact reinforce segregation by building more buffers between individuals and communities by encouraging strict neighborhood boundaries. New urbanism in the opinion of these critics encourages self-absorbed, high-priced, and exclusive neighborhoods—a notion that causes great worry to those residents who hope New Orleans planners will make racial and socioeconomic integration a priority in their reconstruction efforts. Citizens have watched segregation along lines of race and class actually worsen in New Orleans over the last few decades, resulting in poor government subsidized housing, cramped living conditions in poorer neighborhoods, and educational inequalities that have perpetuated violence, poor health, and a declining quality of life. The meaning of *structural inequality* has been felt on the most literal and personal level in New Orleans—and even before Katrina resulted in those with the means to do so living as far away from the inner-city as possible. The bifurcated social geography that this created allowed the “haves” to become more and more detached from the plight of the “have-nots”—a plight that Katrina (for better or worse) placed back in the national spotlight and their individual consciences. For this group of detractors, new urbanism

might bring the “haves” geographically closer to the city but will continue to keep them socially and economically as segregated as before.

This segregated structure is exactly what New Orleans’ residents need to keep in mind and work to avoid as they make plans to rebuild their city. In an article in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Whitney Gould explores the resistance to new urbanism.²⁸ Gould references the work of Reed Kroloff, dean of Tulane’s school of architecture, who blasts the new urbanism concept declaring that the “nostalgic, Disney version of tomorrow and revival-style, touch me, come to Jesus ‘marketing techniques,’” of the movement will unquestionably “reinvent the hierarchical structures of the Old South.” In more specific terms, Kroloff feels that new urbanism is “a one-size-fits-all approach to city design...” and proclaims that “in a city like New Orleans, where the patterns are already established, we don't need [the Congress of New Urbanism] to tell us how to rebuild. We know how to make a city.” Yet, thinking back to the state of New Orleans prior to Katrina, a rebuilding of the old structure — while perhaps not marking a return to the Old South — would without question do little to alleviate the problems of segregation along the lines of race and class. Does New Orleans in fact *really* know how to build a city? If the answer is not favorable, will New Orleans be willing to change its ways — and does it even want to?

New Orleans is a beloved city with a rich tradition and history — the type of city where resistance to change is all the more amplified. As Gould satirically comments, “Those poor new urbanists. To witness the drubbing they're taking from some of their critics, you'd think this movement of neo-traditional architects and planners was peddling crack to babies.”²⁹ With such resistance, one is confronted with the question of how New Orleans goes about rebuilding homes, reinventing neighborhood structure, and retaining their historic identity. Can new urbanism enable city planners to correct the problems that have plagued the city for decades while realistically accommodating everyone from the CEOs to the low-wage hospitality industry employer to those on welfare? In order to truly assess the validity of the arguments made by both new urbanism proponents and its detractors, one must look at how some of America’s troubled cities have implemented the movement’s principles in their efforts to provide affordable housing and simultaneously work to transcend racial and class divisions.

A Case Study of the Hill District in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

It is clear that new urbanism works for high income areas, but the critical question is this: can new urbanism’s principles be modified for a city like New Orleans so that the new urbanism model fits not only low-income needs but also government subsidized housing projects? One new urbanism community seems to have done just that — Crawford Square of the Hill District in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Sabina Deitrick and Cliff Ellis (2004) assert “many critics seem unaware of the extent to which new urbanists are involved in projects that are not conversions of farmland on the urban fringe, but rather are located in revitalizing, older industrial neighborhoods” (2). In fact, Deitrick and Ellis (2004) believe that the practical design application of new urbanism can easily be applied to “infill” projects

that is, revitalizing rundown urban areas at an affordable cost. Their main argument is simply that new urbanism is a design principle. Thus, it can be adapted to fit other neighborhood models not just beach towns and expensive suburban communities. They use the Hill District in Pittsburgh as an example of this main point.

The Hill District is a community adjacent to downtown Pittsburgh. Urban Design Associates, the developer of the community, began working on the Hill District's Crawford Square in 1990. Crawford Square is a four hundred and twenty-seven unit residential area that has a mixture of homeowners, renters, and government-subsidized housing (Bressi 2002, 67). The developers used the Hope VI grant an endowment from the U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development that gives federal money to abolish run-down public housing and encourage decentralizing its residents to combine new urbanism principles to government subsidized housing.

Historically, the Hill District community had deteriorated since the steel industry went into wane in the seventies (Deitrick and Ellis 2004, 3). Similar to the declining state of New Orleans at the time of Katrina, the Pittsburgh area lost one hundred and fifteen thousand manufacturing jobs between 1980 and 1986. While the national employment rate grew, Pittsburgh's dropped by eight percent. Economic leaders realized they needed to make advances in the economy to counter the decline in Pittsburgh's steel industry, and the city's economy moved away from manufacturing to service industry jobs. The city now leads the nation in employment areas such as health care, education, and the financial sector. These advances were made possible through a pairing of community development corporations (CDCs) and non-profits that worked toward revitalizing the city. One aspect of this revival came in the early nineties with the redevelopment of the Hill District.

A critical aspect of the community development was the role of the CDCs. As Deitrick and Ellis (2004) explain, "CDCs have emerged over a nearly forty year history as important suppliers of affordable housing in the U.S. conceived to bring about the social, economic, and physical revitalization of their communities and to improve residents' lives" (2). CDCs have evolved in their role in the community throughout the last forty years, moving from the role of supplying housing to community development. The corporations seek economic revival of downtrodden areas and demand measurable outcomes of their success. Deitrick and Ellis (2004) point out that while CDCs have stressed community development, many have overlooked the viability of applying the new urbanist model:

More attention should be paid to urban design community development because good design can improve the quality, durability, marketability, and community acceptance of inner-city revitalization efforts. Subsidized new urbanist projects can also enhance community efforts to promote housing integration and diversity... [The] Pittsburgh case study shows successful unions between community development and new urbanism based on a reciprocal learning experience between architects and community groups (3).

The approach that Urban Design Associates took in revitalizing the Crawford Square area was not based on the contractor's plans, but instead from the community's perspective in a strategy that worked from the ground up. Communication between community residents and contractors allowed for the development of an affordable, livable city.

Crawford Square was the first government-subsidized new urbanism community in Pittsburgh. The community provides a fitting parallel to the more damaged areas of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, as the demographic for the area is about seventy percent black with only twenty percent owning homes (Bressi 2002, 73). Also similar to the harder hit areas of New Orleans, the Crawford Square neighborhood relies heavily on rental and government subsidized housing. Crawford Square has over 400 units on 18 acres; in phase I and II there are two hundred and seventy four rental units and forty-seven owner-occupied houses, and phase III has seventy-four rental units and twenty for-sale houses (Deitrick and Ellis 2004, 5). To provide affordable housing, the developer used a low income tax credit for the rental units. Mortgage subsidies were used on the first two phases of the for-sale houses, and the prices were set at \$90,000-120,000 (compared to the median home-owner costs of \$87,300 in New Orleans pre-Katrina). The last phase of housing went for around \$200,000 and was not government subsidized. Yet this high-end housing proves crucial in the new urbanist model, as wealthier family dwellings bring a greater diversity of community members and more income into the area.

Community input greatly shaped the nature of the housing as well as the structure of the broader neighborhood (Bressi 2002, 69). Community members stressed the notion of connectivity, as they demanded more easily navigable streets with direct access to downtown. Secondly, the inclusion of local parks and open space revitalized the feeling of a shared space. The parks contributed to a scenic view of downtown that facilitated the building of more extravagant homes along the parks' edge. These homes, which were part of phase III, attracted wealthier homeowners who also had the means to invest in the community (Bressi 2002, 70). The importance of aesthetics was also translated into the layout of the city streets in that the parking was hidden from view, located behind the housing units. In practice, the area looked and felt more like a walkable, livable city. Further, the buildings themselves were designed and built to look like the architectural style of old Pittsburgh. "The Pittsburgh projects examined here are not theme parks or 'unreal' urban fragments," as Deitrick and Ellis (2004) note, "on the contrary, they are the very real future that was selected by local residents and community development" (2). The Crawford Square community wanted to go back to its roots, evoking a shared past that also invests in its future. As one can easily see, retaining of community identity through historic neighborhood preservation is not necessarily lost in the new urbanist model. Crawford Square challenges the belief that new urbanism only supports wealthy areas and is a "Disneyfication" of community living. Crawford Square is affordable and accessible to a variety of incomes, and further, has turned around a downtrodden metropolitan neighborhood into a livable community that embraces the look and feel of historic Pittsburgh.

Conclusion

In rebuilding New Orleans, city officials must be honest in their assessment of the city's needs and must consider its problems and shortcomings both pre- and post-Katrina. New Orleans has been declining since the 1960s in terms of its economy, education, segregation, crime, and poverty. Hurricane Katrina exposed a city in which the poor were living in substandard public housing with few opportunities and support services to escape the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Segregation of neighborhoods along lines of race and class "blinded" those with the means to help the plight of the impoverished and gave the poor little hope that a better life was attainable. Corrupt city officials provided poor leadership that did little to protect the city from the threat of natural disaster—a potential they knew had been on the horizon for years. Katrina has put New Orleans in a unique position in that its destruction and devastation has given the city an opportunity to address some of its problems and come back even stronger. Successful rebuilding, however, will only come to New Orleans when its leaders and residents celebrate the city's unique historical identity while also coming to terms with some of the faults that were also part of that past. New urbanism is one design model that has a great deal of potential to help New Orleanians accomplish both.

Pittsburgh's revitalization of the Hill District's Crawford Square provides the critical insights into the way in which New Orleans city planners could apply the new urbanism model in renewing the devastated areas of the city. Before implementing new urbanist principles, the Crawford Square District was an impoverished area that was intensely segregated and, demographically speaking, very similar to New Orleans. In rebuilding the area, Pittsburgh developers implemented new urbanist design principles in government subsidized housing areas and in so doing, created homes for those who could not previously afford them and improved the overall quality of life (Deitrick and Ellis 2004, 10). Thus, the Hill District and Crawford Square serve as an excellent example of how one run-down urban area in desperate need of improvements turned itself around by relying on the new urbanism model and transformed the area into a place where people were proud to call home.

With the help of city planners, architects, developers, and community input, New Orleans, too, can create a city that embodies the core principles of new urbanism and still looks and feels like the historic New Orleans that Americans know and love. In assessing the applicability of the model, however, developers need to be careful not to get bogged down in details but instead to focus on the benefits of the model as a whole. New urbanism is not a package deal—one must be realistic and acknowledge that the most attractive and beneficial new urbanist principles for one city will not necessarily be the same as applicable for another city. With its historic segregation along lines of race and class and recent natural disaster, New Orleans will clearly benefit from some new urbanist principles more than others. Mixed-use communities of business, houses, and schools will energize the economy and allow families to come back and once again call New Orleans home. Mixed-income neighborhoods will incorporate all socioeconomic levels and bring the previously segregated city one step closer to tran-

scending its historic racial divide. High density building will make urban sprawl less necessary and result in fewer people living in flood prone areas. New urbanism's focus on quality architecture will ensure that the unique aesthetic appeal that has come to define New Orleans remains. In the end, the combination of these qualities will come together and result in a renewed New Orleans – better, stronger, and with a brighter future than ever.

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