

# **Rebuilding New Orleans Housing and Neighborhood Planning Platform**

## **All Congregations Together Louisiana Interfaiths Together PICO National Network**

On October 4, 2005 Louisiana Interfaith Together (PICO LIFT) and its six Louisiana federations gathered 1,000 displaced and host families in Baton Rouge to launch a Covenant to Rebuild Louisiana. Hundreds of congregations and local, state and federal officials have signed on to the Covenant, which is built around the right of families to return to their homes and communities. Since October PICO LIFT and All Congregations Together (ACT) have listened to the concerns and ideas of more than 4,000 displaced families, including surveys of 1,400 New Orleans families during February. On March 5 and March 12 clusters of ACT congregations from across New Orleans representing every planning area and city council district held six community meetings attended by more than 1,500 people. PICO LIFT's six Louisiana federations have also solicited input from hundreds of families living in other parts of the state.

ACT and PICO LIFT are working to make sure that the voices and interests of displaced families are heard in planning and policy decisions made in New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Washington, DC. ACT and PICO LIFT are insisting that all families that wish to return are able to return home to safe, viable, mixed-income neighborhoods. We are organizing to make sure that rebuild neighborhoods provide affordable housing and economic, educational and social opportunities to all families. This platform lays out initial steps that ACT and PICO LIFT leaders believe are necessary to begin rebuilding a better New Orleans region.

## **Temporary Housing**

As New Orleans begins a planning process that will shape the future of the city for decades, those who most need to participate in rebuilding decisions are being kept far from the city by a lack of temporary and affordable housing. As of March 14 FEMA has been able to provide just 7,154 temporary housing units in New Orleans. This leaves less than five percent of displaced New Orleans families with temporary housing in the city. Based on FEMA reports we estimate that 15,000 families who have requested housing are still waiting for help. Many families that have received trailers have not had them hooked up to electricity and sewage. Increasing the supply of temporary housing is essential to a fair and inclusive planning process for the New Orleans region.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking FEMA** to provide temporary housing to all families that have requested it in New Orleans within 30 days.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking FEMA** to issue weekly reports on the number of families waiting for temporary housing in New Orleans, the

number of occupied temporary housing units, the number that have been delivered but are not occupied, and the number awaiting water, sewer or electric hookups.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking FEMA** to extend the deadline for single source contracts for trailer park sites, so that churches and other can continue to apply for expedited contracts to host travel trailers.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking FEMA** to work with HUD, Louisiana and New Orleans officials to create a one-for-one taskforce to begin developing a temporary housing exit strategy that provides one-for-one permanent housing options (rental, rent to own, homeownership, and renovation assistance) for families living in temporary housing.

**ACT is asking the City of New Orleans** to invite Entergy, the Sewage and Water Board and the Sanitation Department to attend weekly City Council sessions to report on their progress in restoring basic services to all New Orleans neighborhoods.

## **Affordable Housing**

Flooding destroyed 128,000 private homes and 133,000 rental units. Yet more than six months after Katrina families have yet to receive a penny in federal aid to help rebuild their homes. Without clear information about what will happen to their communities or what resources will be available to rebuild, families have been left to their own devices. Speculators have already started to buy up homes, preying on desperation and confusion. The majority of displaced families who rented face great obstacles in returning home. Rents for apartments in the New Orleans area have doubled and tripled. Families being evicted from hotels in New Orleans are being sent back to homeless shelters, located in some cases hundreds of miles away from the city. New Orleans faces an affordable housing crisis. Yet at a February 15, 2006 hearing before the Senate Banking Committee, HUD Secretary Alphonse Jackson said that he was not aware of a rental shortage in New Orleans. To bring families back to New Orleans city, state and federal government needs to work much more quickly with families and with private and non-profit developers to renovate and rebuild large quantities of affordable housing.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking Congress** to immediately pass \$4.2 billion in supplemental community development funding to help homeowners rebuild their homes and fund renovation and new construction of rental and ownership housing for families that were renters pre-Katrina.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking Congress** to remove the Stafford Act section 404 restrictions from the \$4.2 billion so that local and state government have the flexibility to use money to rehabilitate homes and safely redevelop communities as needed.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking HUD and FEMA** to work together to reopen federally subsidized housing, including HUD/HANO apartments, and FHA owned properties, in New Orleans to meet a growing crisis of affordable housing in the region.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking HUD and FEMA** to provide a list of federally-subsidized housing units in the New Orleans region, including the condition of these units and the timeline for bringing them online.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking HUD and FEMA** to develop creative strategies for transferring federally owned properties for redevelopment by non-profit community development organizations.

**ACT and PICO LIFT are asking the State of Louisiana** to include enough resources in the state's Community Development Block Grant request to HUD to build and renovate affordable homeownership and rental housing for the majority of low and moderate-income displaced families who did not own property in New Orleans, but still want to return to the city.

**ACT and PICO LIFT are asking the State of Louisiana** to assure that as part of block grant request there is funding set aside to enable non-profit developers to acquire and renovate abandoned and damaged housing for ownership and rental for displaced families.

**ACT and PICO LIFT are asking the State of Louisiana** to adopt a 20/20 affordable housing policy that set asides 20 percent of units for low-income families and 20 percent for low to moderate-income families for all large-scale housing construction that receives public subsidy for either land acquisition or development.

**ACT and PICO LIFT are asking the State of Louisiana** to assure that pre-Katrina renters and homeowners who are not able to rebuild their homes receive first priority for new affordable housing, including creating pathways for homeownership.

**ACT and PICO LIFT are asking the State of Louisiana** to convene state legislative leaders, FEMA officials, local officials, the State Insurance Commissioner and private insurance companies to address the need for affordable insurance products for families that want to rebuild in Louisiana.

**ACT and PICO LIFT are asking the State of Louisiana** to make a formal request that HUD repair and return to use publicly subsidized housing units in the New Orleans region.

## **Neighborhood Planning**

Each Sunday thousands of families travel from Baton Rouge, Shreveport, Houston and across the South to New Orleans to work on their homes and worship together. A January survey by the City of New Orleans found that the population of the New Orleans that flooded was down from 350,000 to 50,000, but that the number of people in the once-flooded areas doubled or more on weekend days. Rising church attendance and the influx of residents point to the will that families have to return and rebuild. Over the past month 1,500 people participated in six neighborhood meetings organized by ACT across New Orleans. Large numbers of people have also been attending neighborhood civic meetings to voice their needs and intent to return. ACT will be working over the next six months in six clusters to help families and congregations have a real say in how our communities are rebuilt, including

shaping plans for communities that provide adequate and mixed-income affordable housing and high quality health, education and recreation opportunities.

**ACT is asking the Bring Back New Orleans Commission Urban Planners** to assure that ACT member-congregations have representation on the planning teams in the planning districts where we are leading rebuilding campaigns.

**ACT is asking the Bring Back New Orleans Commission Urban Planners** to send planning staff to attend planning days organized by ACT member-congregations in each of our six clusters to solicit input and ideas from residents.

**ACT is asking the Bring Back New Orleans Commission Urban Planners** to make mixed-income and affordable housing (including ownership and rental housing) a necessary part of each neighborhood plan and of the citywide plan to avoid concentration of poverty and to create housing opportunities for all families that want to return.

**ACT is asking the Mayor and City Council** to use their oversight authority over the planning process to assure that no neighborhoods are unfairly written off for redevelopment and that families from all areas of the city are able to have a voice in the final plan.

**ACT is asking the City of New Orleans** to adopt a policy that requires mixed-income and affordable housing (including ownership and rental housing) as part of neighborhood plans and the citywide plan to avoid concentration of poverty and to create the maximum possible housing opportunities for all families that want to return.

## Coastal Restoration

States other than Louisiana get 50 percent of the tax revenues paid to the Federal Government from oil and gas produced on federally owned land. States receive this money because energy production damages their environment and strains their infrastructure. Louisiana does not get a share of the tax revenue from offshore drilling. If it did there would be enough funding to support long-term restoration of the coastal environment, which has been devastated by economic activity.

**ACT, PICO LIFT and PICO National Network are asking Congress** to pass bi-partisan legislation introduced in the House and Senate that would dedicate a portion of the oil and gas revenues from drilling off the Gulf coast to fund coastal restoration and long term storm protection.