

FORWARD NEW ORLEANS

A Set of Principles

Revised December 13, 2007

The critical task of city government is to make citizens and businesses believe that investing in the city's future makes sense. If the city cures fundamental deficiencies, economic development and commercial growth will follow. For this reason, the credibility and accomplishments of local government are critical to the city's recovery and long-term prosperity.

Issue #1 -- Crime

An effective criminal justice system requires systemic competence in all departments; this includes the police department, the District Attorney's Office, the public defender, the Criminal Sheriff, the Clerk of Court, and the judiciary. Each is indispensable to a healthy criminal justice system.

New Orleans criminal justice system must receive appropriate funding, resources, and support to achieve systemic competence. The following will be ongoing resource requests of the post-Katrina criminal justice system recovery.

City officials must:

- A. Funding.** Provide adequate funding for infrastructure and resources in budget cycles.
- B. Facilities.** Provide fast-track rebuilding and equipping of permanent offices so law enforcement officials, including police and district attorneys, can work effectively.
- C. War on Violent Crime.** Prioritize the war on crime, with emphasis on violent crime, through focus, resources and funding.
- D. New Orleans Crime Coalition.** Cooperate with the New Orleans Crime Coalition to design and implement effective crime fighting strategies.
- E. Transparency.** Mandate transparency, efficiency, and cooperation among criminal justice system agencies.
- F. Strategy.** Demand that criminal justice system agencies develop and articulate strategies to restore waning public confidence in the system.

Issue #2 - Rebuilding: Facilities, Infrastructure and Property

Post-Katrina rebuilding lags reasonable expectations. Compromised facilities and infrastructure contradict messages of progress. City officials must immediately develop and implement realistic plans for addressing critical components.

City officials must:

- A. Essential Services.** Provide equipment and permanent facilities to police and fire departments and the District Attorney's office commensurate with industry standards and any local needs that exceed industry standards.
- B. Street Repair.** Repair deteriorated streets prioritizing needs and funding with specific criteria, including frequency and volume of use, severity of deterioration, and economies of scale with regard to logistics of repairs.
- C. FEMA Funding for Infrastructure Repair.** Pursue more aggressively FEMA funding and reimbursement of infrastructure repair. Reevaluate the city's current procedures on requesting FEMA monies to improve on legal and practical strategies.
- D. Blighted Property.** Eliminate blighted property by establishing clear, consistent, fair and effective procedures for maintenance, expropriation and resale of blighted property. Define property owner obligations more clearly. Firmly enforce code violations. Fund the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA) and thereby enable it to fulfill its statutorily mandated mission of eliminating and preventing the spread of blight in accordance with Community Improvement Plans.

Issue #3 - City Finances

The city's 2008 estimated revenue presents opportunities for tremendous progress if the budget properly reflects rebuilding priorities. The city must use its resources with a vision for long-term success, and prioritize spending consistent with highest return on investment from a rebuilding perspective.

City officials must:

- A. Budget.** Align the city's budget with rebuilding priorities.
- B. Operations.** Right size city operations for current and future population levels.
- C. Spending.** Eliminate patronage and excessive spending. Immediately disclose publicly or to the city's Inspector General improper use of taxpayer's dollars. Advocate smart, efficient and transparent government spending.
- D. Funding.** Prioritize funding for currently un- or under-funded agencies or departments that could contribute significantly to the rebuilding process if they had adequate funding, specifically including NORA, the Office of the Inspector General, and the City Planning Commission.

Issue #4 – Ethical City Government

Ethical government requires transparency with effective, aggressive oversight. It is imperative that the city's elected officials abide by the highest standards of ethical conduct to restore public trust and rebut prevailing perceptions of corruption and dishonesty.

City officials must:

- A. Office of the Inspector General - Funding.** Fully fund the Office of the Inspector General consistent with the \$2,930,718 budget submitted by the office, exclusive of any funding for the Ethics Review Board.
- B. Office of the Inspector General - Independence.** Respect the independence of the Office of Inspector General in setting its agenda, and avoid making requests of that office that are not firmly within its key mission of preventing and detecting fraud, waste, abuse and illegal acts within city government. Elected Officials must not enlist the services of the Office of the Inspector General for garden-variety research, audit, or review when those tasks properly can and should be handled by other city employees.
- C. Transparency and Freedom from Conflict.** Provide transparency for the citizenry and recuse themselves from decisions or votes that may in some manner benefit themselves, their families, friends or benefactors.
- D. Ethical Conduct.** Always engage in, and insist on, highest standards of ethical conduct from themselves, colleagues, and private citizens doing business with the city.

Issue #5 – City Planning Process

Consistent and fair rules for land use and property development are vital to the city's economic development. City Council review of zoning and land use for individual parcels politicizes land use decisions, and undermines the integrity of the city's planning practices. The City Council's authority should extend only to overarching planning issues; and, City Planning Commission administrators should be the arbiters of parcel-specific decisions.

City officials must:

- A. City Planning Commission - Funding.** Appropriate adequate funding and staffing to the City Planning Commission as mandated by the City Charter, and include funding to enable its program for citizen participation and reporting.
- B. City Planning Commission – Participation in Rebuilding.** Acknowledge the City Charter's designation of the City Planning Commission as the entity charged with planning for recovery from natural and other disasters, and include its meaningful participation in the rebuilding process.
- C. City Planning Commission – Appointments.** Reform the City Planning Commission appointment process from mayoral appointment to a nominating committee process, where a nominating committee composed of persons with the greatest depth of knowledge of the city's land use and planning submits a list of nominees to the mayor for his use in making appointments.
- D. Consistent Rules – New Orleans Master Plan and CZO.** Vote to give the force of law to the New Orleans Master Plan and adopt the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, both currently in progress by the City Planning Commission, so rules for land use, development, and zoning will be clear, predictable, and fair. Eliminate spot zoning.
- E. Elimination of Discretionary Review by Council.** Change the City Charter to restrict the City Council's discretionary review of land use, development, zoning and preservation decisions for individual parcels.

Issue #6 - Recovery School District

The Business Council strongly supports the Recovery School District (RSD). The RSD presents an opportunity to transform New Orleans Public Schools by creating an educational marketplace, where schools are driven to improve and excel to attract and retain students and resources.

- A. High Quality Operators.** Encourage BESE and the state superintendent to attract and support high quality charter operators and replace low performing RSD operated or chartered schools with high quality operators.

Issue #7 - Transparent, Standard, Competitive Bid Process

Local voters adopted charter revisions in 1995 which require a competitive selection process in awarding professional services contracts. The selection of competent professionals in a fair and transparent manner is an obligation of city officials.

City officials must:

- A. Standardized Process.** Standardize professional services contracting to encompass a single process for all branches of city government.
- B. Bid Packets.** Introduce procedures to ensure that the city prepares bid packets according to national standards for the relevant industry. Bid packets should clearly describe and define the scope of work so potential bidders are not discouraged from bidding due to inability to determine key information.
- C. Consultative Award Process.** Require a consultative process to precede the award of professional services contracts whereby uninterested (independent) professionals within the relevant industry are asked to review bid proposals and provide insight into the relative strengths, weaknesses, and financial feasibility of the proposals.
- D. Transparency.** Ensure the evaluations and awards of professional services contracts are open, transparent, fully disclosed, and independent of politics and patronage.
- E. Performance Measurements and Monitoring.** Implement performance measurements and monitoring of city contracts.

Issue #8 – Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans

As presently constituted by state and city law, the Board of Directors of the Sewerage and Water Board consists of thirteen members: (1) the mayor; (2) the two at-large city council members; (3) an additional city council member; (4) two members of the Board of Liquidation, City Debt; and (5) seven citizens (two from the city at large, and one from each of the five council districts) appointed by the mayor, with the advice and consent of the city council. The proper function of this agency, and the dependable delivery of water, sewer and drainage services, are vital to the region's ability to retain and grow its population and economy. Thus, the Sewerage and Water Board and its customers deserve an improved governance structure that eliminates the potential for political distractions or conflicts by Board members also serving as city council members, and ensures, through a nominating committee process, Board member qualifications and commitment commensurate with the technical, operational and financial complexity of the agency.

City officials must:

- A. Reform Governance.** Support and advocate legislative and city charter amendments to improve the Sewerage and Water Board governance structure to eliminate political conflicts of interest and ensure qualified, engaged, effective, and independent Board leadership.

Issue #9 - The Business Climate

The key to economic development is creating a desirable place to live and work. The city must improve the quality of life and ease of doing business in New Orleans. For existing businesses to remain, and new ones to come, they must be confident that the city can reliably provide basic services, and that the decision to locate employees and their families in New Orleans is a reasonable one. If the city secures and improves the basics, commercial growth will follow.

City officials must:

- A. Quality of Life.** Cure fundamental deficiencies in quality of life issues, including, without limitation, crime, infrastructure, essential services, streets, and education, so businesses will consider the city an attractive place in which to operate.
- B. Business Retention.** Work to retain existing businesses by addressing fundamental deficiencies and by being receptive to specific concerns and problems where the city can provide or help fashion a remedy.
- C. Economic Development Leader.** Hire a qualified, experienced leader of economic development who will be visible and accessible to existing and potential businesses needing information or assistance.
- D. Legal Framework.** Apply rules, regulations, and ordinances affecting businesses consistently and predictably, and refuse the influence of politics, patronage and relationships, so corporate citizens can have confidence in the integrity of the legal framework in which they operate.
- E. City Processes.** Eliminate inefficiencies in city processes for permitting and licensing that deter or hamper business operations, or unnecessarily make them more costly.
- F. Economic Development Plan.** Assess economic development best practices to determine whether, how and when the city could benefit from implementation.
- G. Standardize Financial Incentives.** If the city is going to award economic development incentives, such as tax abatements and diversions, it must standardize the policies and procedures for awarding them to eliminate *ad hoc* and inconsistent determinations.