Time-Honored Versus Bigger and Better:

Critical and Strategic Conservation in Post-Katrina Mississippi

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Abstract

Hurricane Katrina struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005. Although much of the media's attention focused on New Orleans and the horrific conditions at the Superdome, the strongest quadrant of the storm—the northeast quadrant—devastated the entire Mississippi coastline from Waveland in the west to Pascagoula in the east. In western Hancock County, the storm surge was greater than 30 feet, and many communities were subjected to Category 3 force winds. Large areas of beachfront property were leveled, and approximately 60,000 homes were destroyed or made uninhabitable.

In October 2005, just six weeks after the storm, more than 100 planning and other professionals met for a one-week session of design charrettes—called the Mississippi Renewal Forum—to plan the future of all 11 coastal cities. These planners, members of the Congress for the New Urbanism, were led by Andrés Duany, the charismatic and often controversial leader of the New Urbanist movement.

The results of the planning charrettes were delivered to Mississippi's leaders and the public in November, about two and half months after the storm. (In contrast, the Louisiana and New Orleans replanning process took longer than two years.) The New Urbanist visions for the Gulf Coast created a sense of hope among the Coast population, and they contributed to the appearance of planned recovery, which sped the delivery of federal funds to the Coast. However, the planning process also created tension among Coast leaders and the general public, and the plans—completed during a series of late-night sessions—continue to influence the recovery of the Coast today.

This paper examines two contradictory directives from the Mississippi Renewal Forum—rebuilding in a time-honored (past-oriented) manner versus building in a bigger and better (future-oriented) manner. This paper argues that the New Urbanists who participated in the Mississippi Renewal Forum were deeply engaged in the debate between the time-honored and the bigger and better, and that they arrived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast with firmly held positions that influenced their planning work.

Next, this paper examines five case study projects. With the exception of one of the case study publications, all of these projects were designed post-Katrina, and most of them were heavily influenced by the Mississippi Renewal Forum. The case studies are Beauvoir, the last home of Confederate president Jefferson Davis; Point Cadet, a historic neighborhood in East Biloxi; the new Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge, built on the footprint of the destroyed bridge; two post-Katrina publications, demonstrating virtual conservation; and Fort Maurepas Park, a new public park built on the site of the destroyed Fort Maurepas replica. Penultimately, this paper argues that Fort Maurepas Park represents the best balance between the time-honored and the bigger and better. Finally, this paper argues that the success of Fort Maurepas Part was more accidental than designed and that a more explicit debate between the time-honored and the bigger and better is necessary if a community wants to fully exploit opportunities in a post-disaster environment.

Time-honored versus bigger and better

Not surprisingly, an enterprise as daunting as planning post-Katrina Mississippi generated its share of contradictory directives. One critical and omnipresent question was the temporal orientation of the planning—should it look toward the past or toward the future? On one hand, many Coast residents desired to "rebuild the Coast in a time-honored way" (Urban Design Associates 2005).[1] On the other hand, many saw a compelling case to build the Coast "bigger and better."[2]

Fully explicating the issue of building in a past-oriented manner versus building in a future-oriented manner is beyond the scope of this paper; however, a few thoughts on the issue are necessary to place the Mississippi Renewal Forum in its historical context.

The question of temporal orientation initially seems obvious, but that was not always the case. From the inception of Western history to the end of the Middle Ages, the past and present were considered one. Philosopher David Lowenthal wrote:

> The disjunction of past from present became significantly apparent only during the Renaissance, when rapport with antiquity made humanists exaggerate the unlikeness of more recent medieval times…. and feel poignantly their remoteness from ancient Rome. (Lowenthal 1985, pg. 390)

The very terms *Dark Ages* and *Middle Ages* suggest this disjuncture: the time between the fall of Rome to the Renaissance is not seen as a continuum, but an aberration, which cleaves the past from the present. Thus, for the first time in Western history, the past is seen as distinct from the present.

Before the twentieth century, architecture and urban design were driven by precedent. While the preferred precedent changed—Classicism for Inigo Jones, Gothic for Charles Barry, for example— architects from the Renaissance to the Victorian era mined the past for an ever growing cache of styles. Philosophically, these architects thought about two times—the past and the present. Referring to monumental buildings, the nineteenth-century philosopher John Ruskin outlined two tasks: "[T]he first, to render the architecture of the day, historical; and the second, to preserve, as the most precious of inheritances, that of past ages" (Ruskin 1989, pg. 178). For Ruskin, the future is simply the time when the present can become the past.

The reverence for the time-honored was rejected in the early twentieth century, however. Modern architects, advocating a future-oriented vision of the bigger and better, attempted to effect an explicit

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[1] The quote is from Governor Haley Barbour's introduction to *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods.*

[2] The phrase was ubiquitous in post-Katrina Mississippi. The title of the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal report is *Building Back Better Than Ever*. Likewise, CNN reporter Kathleen Koch writes:

> In fact, Atlanta-based producer Emily Probst had raised the [issue of optimism] with me during our September shoot. "I don't understand how they remain so optimistic," she said. "Everyone says, 'We're fortunate. We'll be okay. We'll rebuild **bigger and better**.' And I look around and wonder, 'Are they seeing what I'm seeing?'" (Koch 2010, pg. 159, emphasis added)

break with the past.[3] The great French Modernist Le Corbusier wrote, "Modern life demands, and is waiting for, a new kind of plan, both for the house and the city" (Le Corbusier 1927, pg. 44). For Corbusier and other modernists, rapid technological changes required a revised design and planning philosophy that was appropriate for the spirit of the age. Corbusier says that advances in steel and concrete construction have created an architecture in which "the old codes have been overturned" (Le Corbusier 1927, pg. 13). He calls architects lazy, saying they avoid progress (Le Corbusier 1927, pg. 101). With the ascent of the new, the past must recede. Those who work in a tradition are marginalized in favor of the avant-garde. Lowenthal said, "We are no longer allowed to borrow or appropriate from others; to be creative we must be wholly original" (Lowenthal 1985, pg. 373). This observation is the crux of the criticism of the New Urbanists, who will be discussed in the next section.

At the scale of urban design, modernist planners advocated the destruction of much of the historic city. For example, Le Corbusier famously proposed replacing Haussmann's Paris with a series of towers in parks, all connected with a network of high-speed roadways. In the United States, modernist architects following the inspiration of Le Corbusier provided the intellectual underpinnings for vast 1950s and 1960s urban renewal projects that leveled the historic urban fabric and replaced it with government centers, apartment towers, elevated roadways, and other large-scale projects. The urban renewal period of American planning represents the large-scale and explicit removal of the time-honored in favor of the bigger and (supposedly) better.

While these projects were certainly bigger, many argued that they were worse—not better—than the urban fabric they replaced. The demolition of the Penn Station Terminal in the 1960s and its replacement by the mediocre Madison Square Garden was a watershed moment, inspiring the designation of numerous historic landmarks and historic preservation districts across the United States. Those who loved the time-honored struck back, and the demolition of large segments of center cities to clear space for futuristic mega-projects ceased.

Although by the final quarter of the twentieth-century attitudes toward urban renewal had changed, American planning was still dominated by modernist planning theories. This frustrated those who believed that empirical evidence suggested those theories were an insufficient—if not entirely misguided—means to create livable cities. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a group of architects and planners—the New Urbanists—addressed this intellectual vacuum, providing an alternative planning philosophy to modernism.

Interestingly, the godfather of New Urbanism, Leon Krier, would not necessarily see a conflict between building in a time-honored way and building bigger and better. "[Krier] argues that tradition and progress are not in conflict, that there is no *zeitgeist* that dictates that urbanism must only have the

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[3] In *Suburban Nation*, Duany et. al. set up Modernism as a straw man, representing everything wrong with the built environment. Arguably, this is unfair, since modernists hold a variety of positions, and the modern movement is not a monolith. However, for the purposes of this paper, *modernism* is used to refer to the Corbusian strain of thinking in which the new should replace the old. On the scale of urban design, the means the replacement of historic areas with new construction of a radically different type.

mark of a particular point in time" (Talen 2005, pg. 233). For Krier, modernism's break with the past is an illusion, because cities inherently accrete over time.

What is New Urbanism?

New Urbanism is an urban design philosophy based on traditional (i.e. pre-automobile) neighborhood design.[4] The New Urbanists are self-acknowledged empiricists (Duany 2011), unabashedly examining existing urban fabrics and often attempting to duplicate them. This openness to tradition—to the time-honored—means that many architects and others who admire traditional architectural design find a sympathetic audience among New Urbanist planners. Although Duany says that he is a stylistic "agnostic" (Duany 2011), the movement he helped found openly embraces traditionalism. This openness to traditional forms is anathema to many modernist critics and academics and is the reason New Urbanism is often pilloried in the press.

While traditionalism is an important component of New Urbanism, conceiving of the movement in purely retrograde terms is a mistake. Certainly, a bigger and better component exists within New Urbanism. For example, innovative form-based codes, including Duany Plater-Zyberk's SmartCode, import the idea of transects—sections cuts through sample environments—from the study of ecology. Form-based codes are designed to allow increased density—the bigger—while improving streetscapes—the better. Form-based codes have the potential to be the biggest innovation in urban planning since the widespread adoption of Euclidian zoning in the 1920s.

The key figures in New Urbanism include Andrés Duany; his wife and design partner Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk; John Norquist, the former mayor of Milwaukee and the current president and CEO of the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU); the planning and architecture firm of Elizabeth Moule and Stefanos Polyzoides; and author and unofficial gadfly James Howard Kunstler. The movement can be summarized by examining three seminal moments: the design of Seaside, Florida, in 1981; the formation of the Congress for the New Urbanism in 1993; and the publication of *Suburban Nation* in 2000.

Seaside, Florida, is a planned vacation community on Florida's "Forgotten Coast," 30 miles west of Panama City. A commercial and critical success, Seaside was called by *Time* magazine "the most astounding design achievement of its era" (Time 1990). Such laudatory language, usually reserved for long-span bridges, massive arenas, and skyscrapers—not a collection of historically-influenced beach cottages, attests to the power of the concept.

Seaside contains many features associated with New Urbanism: small lot sizes, relatively high density, easy pedestrian access, a town center with retail establishments, and fairly strict architectural controls. Unlike most other New Urbanist neighborhoods (or other neighborhoods, for that matter), Seaside is located on a gorgeous strip of brilliantly white sand and aqua blue water. Depending on one's point of view, Seaside represents the perfect town—or the imitation of a perfect town. The town's visual impact

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[4] New Urbanism, like Modernism, is not a monolith. This paper refers specifically to what Alex Krieger calls "East Coast" New Urbanism, led by Andrés Duany (Krieger 2012).

was not lost on the producers of *The Truman Show*, who used Seaside as the stage setting for the title character's idealized small-town home.

The Congress for the New Urbanism was formed in 1993 to promote the New Urbanist design philosophy.   The original CNU charter was published in 1996; the major tenets are as follows:

> The Congress for the New Urbanism views disinvestment in central cities, the spread of placeless sprawl, increasing separation by race and income, environmental deterioration, loss of agricultural lands and wilderness, and the erosion of society's built heritage as one interrelated community-building challenge.

> We stand for the **restoration** of existing urban centers and towns within coherent metropolitan regions, the **reconfiguration** of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighborhoods and diverse districts, the conservation of natural environments, and the preservation of our built legacy.

> We advocate the **restructuring** of public policy and development practices to support the following principles: neighborhoods should be diverse in use and population; communities should be designed for the pedestrian and transit as well as the car; cities and towns should be shaped by physically defined and universally accessible public spaces and community institutions; urban places should be framed by architecture and landscape design that celebrate local history, climate, ecology, and building practice.

> We recognize that physical solutions by themselves will not solve social and economic problems, but neither can economic vitality, community stability, and environmental health be sustained without a coherent and supportive physical framework.

> We represent a broad-based citizenry, composed of public and private sector leaders, community activists, and multidisciplinary professionals. We are committed to **reestablishing** the relationship between the art of building and the making of community, through citizen-based participatory planning and design.

> We dedicate ourselves to reclaiming our homes, blocks, streets, parks, neighborhoods, districts, towns, cities, regions, and environment. (Congress for the New Urbanism 2001, emphasis altered)

A casual reading of the charter might suggest that the New Urbanists are fixated on the past. The charter is dominated by "re" words (e.g. "restoration," "reestablishing") that suggest a return to a past condition and a predilection toward the time-honored. However, the time-honored is not always the CNU's emphasis. For example, the phrase "restructuring of public policy" is used in a context that suggests something new—a community that is designed for pedestrians and mass transit while acknowledging the existence of the car. This proposition is not retrograde, but rather future-oriented.

In 2000, Andrés Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and city planner Jeff Speck published the gospel text of New Urbanism, *Suburban Nation*. The book defined suburban sprawl as low density developments of

predictable homogenous uses: neighborhoods of single family homes, groupings of office parks, and strips of commercial development. The authors offered a convincing critique of suburban sprawl and an equally convincing (at least superficially) series of solutions.

Suburban Nation addressed two of the most controversial elements of New Urbanist philosophy: the style of New Urbanist developments and the role of the architect.[5] While the majority of *Suburban Nation* was focused on planning issues, about 10 pages were dedicated to a critique of Modernist design and contemporary architectural education practices. In the ironically titled section "The Inevitable Question of Style," the authors wrote:

> Traditional neighborhood design has little or nothing to do with the issue of architectural style. This point may seem obvious to lay readers, but the question of style must be addressed for one reason: it is the architectural style of most Traditional Neighborhood Developments that causes them to be dismissed at "nostalgic" by much of the design profession…. [T]he fact is that the current architectural establishment could be accurately described as violently allergic to traditional-style architecture. For many architects, it is impossible to see past the pitched roofs and wooden shutters of Seaside and Kentlands to the progressive town-planning concepts underneath. (Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck 2000, pp. 208-209)

Modernism's "allergy" to tradition can be traced to Le Corbusier and others who advocated an explicit break with the past—"a new kind of plan." As previously discussed, Lowenthal explained that modernism, with its future-only philosophy, cannot accept work that imitates or copies.

Suburban Nation also challenged the modernist (and Randian) notion of the heroic architect, suggesting that architects who work in a tradition produce better architecture than those who work as singular, avant-garde artists:

> While this approach may be less entertaining than inventing a new building style every Monday morning—and thus far less popular in the architecture schools—it affords a designer a degree of expertise and authority that is lacking in the profession today. (Duany, Plater-Zyberk and Speck 2000, pg. 240)

For Duany et. al., architects and planners must be deeply knowledgeable in the history of their professions—the source of the "expertise and authority" that give the professions their stature. This is antithetical to the position of modernism, which says, in Corbusier's language, that "the old codes have been overturned."

The most balanced critic of New Urbanism is Harvard professor Alex Krieger.[6] Krieger admires Thomas Jefferson and is sympathetic toward the American Dream of owning a single-family house on its own

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[5] Questions of style can be tricky. For example, Ocean Springs City Planner Eric Meyer said, "We had someone come in and talk about a LEED building that was contemporary, and I thought, 'That is beautiful,' and the mayor said, 'That is horrendous'" (Meyer 2011).

[6] Andrés Duany calls Krieger "our best-informed critic" (Duany, originalgreen.org 2011). While critical of New Urbanism, Krieger does not outright dismiss it, like many other academics do.

piece of land. Krieger also appreciates the great American city, with its dense downtown and streetcar suburbs. While most critics of New Urbanism dismiss the movement wholesale, Krieger provides a more nuanced set of criticisms.

Opening one of his critiques of New Urbanism, Krieger noted, "In reading the 'Charter of the New Urbanism,' I find little with which anyone could disagree" (Krieger 1998). Krieger argued that there is a general agreement about the need to invest in downtowns, limit sprawl, reduce segregation, and avoid environmental degradation (Krieger 1998). What bothers Krieger is the nebulous nature of New Urbanist philosophy, which claimed to provide "the best of everything" (Krieger 2002, pg. 51).

Krieger's great fear, however, is that the New Urbanists have co-opted the term *urbanism* and in doing so will hurt established cities (Krieger 2002, pg. 51). Because New Urbanist developments typically occur on the fringe of established cities, Krieger is concerned that historic center cities will be ignored. "This is my two (urban) ships passing in the night nightmare: the popularity of a new urbanism impeding the rebounding of some old urbanism—old not in appearance, but in location" (Krieger 1998). In short, Krieger is more concerned about America's Georgetowns than its Kentlands.

Finally, Krieger criticized New Urbanist developments for being too uniform. "America, one hopes, may at the turn of this century be ready for a less singular model of the 'good life'" (Krieger 1998). This is a common argument leveled against many types of suburban development, whether through academic critiques of real places like Levittown or satirical critiques of fictional places like Wisteria Lane.

Duany countered Krieger's arguments by pointing out the market success of New Urbanism. He explained that New Urbanists design projects for the "difficult and problematic" customer who does not have the inclination or financial wherewithal to commission a project but who does have the resources to pick from multiple projects on the market (Duany 1998). Duany also addressed the issue of style:

> At the heart of the academy's contempt for New Urbanism is what Krieger calls its "retrograde" architectural syntax. But this variable is not under the control of New Urbanists. It is the consumer's choice—the determinant of a mass-produced product's design, exercised through selective purchase. (Duany 1998)

Professor Witold Rybczynski echoed Duany's point, saying there is no need for New Urbanists to endorse historical styles because home-buying consumers have already done that (Rybczynski 2006). Put succinctly, traditional homes sell, and the New Urbanists have exploited their understanding of the marketplace to their advantage.

Meanwhile, other critics believe that New Urbanism has been more effective at identifying problems than finding solutions. Robert Bruegmann found that although the New Urbanists' critique of sprawl has been effective in marshaling anti-sprawl forces, the "vast majority" of their projects (as of 2005) function much in the same way as standard suburban developments (Bruegmann 2005, pp. 152-153). This is the argument of those who say that New Urbanism should be renamed New Suburbanism.

Some critics challenge the fundamental premise of New Urbanism, that low-density development is necessarily a problem. Kenneth Kolson noted, "[S]prawl has its attractions. If nothing else, it has been a profoundly democratic phenomenon" (Kolson 2001, pg. 122). Kolson later said that the language describing the ills of suburbia is "eerily familiar" to that used to justify the clearance of blighted urban communities (Kolson 2001, pg. 124). Professor and New Urbanist apologist Emily Talen noted that "[s]prawl may be an inconvenience," but not enough of one to justify spending money or passing laws to change it (Talen 2005, pg. 143).

As a product, sprawl—or at least the houses associated with it—is very popular. Jerry Howard, the CEO of the National Homebuilders Association, notes that "nearly 2/3 of Americans still aspire to the traditional suburban home"[7] (Johnson 2007). Likewise, Catesby Leigh of *American Enterprise* magazine argued that sprawl is inherently American and democratic, providing good housing away from poorly governed cities (Saffron 2007). While most critics argue that New Urbanism does not do enough to engage existing central cities, these critics argue that the target of New Urbanism—suburban sprawl—is actually a good thing.

By the early twenty-first century, the New Urbanists had become a force in American planning—certainly in the planning of greenfield neighborhoods (Krieger 2012). Emily Talen's *New Urbanism & American Planning: The Conflict of Cultures*, published in 2005, attempted to place the movement in the wider context of American planning. Talen divided the history of American planning into four cultures: Incrementalism, represented by small-scale changes in the mode of Jane Jacobs or Christopher Alexander; Urban Plan-Making, represented by the City Beautiful and City Efficient movements; Planned Communities, represented by greenfield developments such as Seaside; and Regionalism, represented by the work of Benton MacKaye (the father of the Appalachian Trail) and others. Talen dismissed Modernist planning as anti-urban, so it receives only passing attention.

Using Talen's taxonomy, one sees that New Urbanists derive their philosophical roots from Incrementalism, create plans like Urban Plan-Makers, and have found their greatest success in Planned Communities, such as Seaside. What is missing is Regionalism. Although Talen says "[t]here is always a discussion [among New Urbanists] of regionalism in terms not unlike MacKaye" (Talen 2005, pg. 276), as of 2005 there was no significant body of New Urbanist work on a regional scale. This may explain the enthusiasm of the New Urbanists when approached with redesigning the Mississippi Gulf Coast—a project of regional scale—after Hurricane Katrina.

In summary, New Urbanism is criticized on a stylistic level for supporting (perhaps permitting) "retrograde" architectural styles. On a more substantive, urban planning level, New Urbanism has been criticized for:

- Distracting attention from established city centers;
- Endorsing projects on the city periphery;

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[7] Howard adds that he expects attitudes to change as the Baby Boomers age and twenty-somethings begin buying their first houses.

- Attacking low-density development, considered by some to be profoundly American and egalitarian.

Although the New Urbanists have been criticized for being backward-looking, the actual position of the New Urbanists toward the past-oriented and the future-oriented is more complex. To summarize, the New Urbanists past-oriented positions include:

- A philosophy based on empirical evidence.
- An acceptance of traditional architectural design.
- A belief that architects are empowered by the profession's traditions.

Their future-oriented positions include:

- Promoting denser suburban developments.
- Creating walkable communities that acknowledge the presence of automobiles.
- Using the concept of the transect to create innovative form-based codes.

Hurricane Katrina

To understand the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, one needs an understanding of the hurricane's history and the forces it unleashed.

As of May 2012, Hurricane Katrina is considered by many to be the worst natural disaster in United States history. Katrina is the third deadliest hurricane in recorded U.S. history, with approximately 1,200 deaths attributed to the storm (Blake and Gibney 2011, pg. 7). [8] Katrina caused $108 billion of damage. When that figure is adjusted for inflation, Katrina did more than twice the damage as the second most expensive hurricane, Hurricane Andrew, which struck Florida in 1992 (Blake and Gibney 2011, pp. 9-11). More than one million people—possibly the largest evacuation in U.S. history—were displaced by Katrina, many of them permanently (Grier 2005).

Katrina is one of the strongest storms in recorded history. Because hurricanes are fed by a differential in air pressure, the barometric pressure of a storm is a good indicator of its overall strength. In recorded history, Katrina had the third lowest barometric pressure upon landfall (920 MB), following only the 1935 Florida Keys hurricane (892 MB) and Hurricane Camille (909 MB) which struck Biloxi in 1969.

Although much of the media's attention focused on New Orleans and the horrific conditions at the Superdome, the strongest quadrant of the storm—the northeast quadrant—devastated the entire Mississippi coastline from Waveland in the west to Pascagoula in the east. In western Hancock County, the storm surge was greater than 30 feet (see Appendix C), and many communities were subjected to Category 3 force winds. Large areas of beachfront property were leveled, and approximately 60,000 homes in Mississippi were destroyed or made uninhabitable.

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[8] A 1900 hurricane killed 8,000 people in Galveston, Texas. A 1928 hurricane killed 2,500 people in Florida. Two nineteenth century hurricanes may have a higher death toll than the 1,200 people killed in Katrina, but the historical record is incomplete (Blake and Gibney 2011).

To understand why citizens and government officials were seemingly unprepared for Hurricane Katrina, one should remember that the storm went from an unorganized tropical wave to the most devastating hurricane in U.S. history in just six days (see Appendix A).

Journalists, meteorologists, and scientists in general commonly note that Hurricane Katrina had "weakened" from a Category 5 hurricane before landfall.[9] The reality along the Mississippi Gulf Coast was hurricane-force winds and, more catastrophically, a storm surge that exceeded 30 feet at its highest. Not to be confused with wave action, storm surge is a general rise in sea level as a hurricane pushes water onto shore. Water rises not only at the beach but also at every river, marsh, and bayou connected to the ocean front. Flood waters reached miles inland in Hancock County and entirely crossed the peninsula that forms East Biloxi in Harrison County. Pascagoula, located relatively far from the eye of the hurricane in Jackson County, was flooded by a 14-foot storm surge.

On the beachfront, buildings were subjected to wave action on top of the rising water. The area where this occurs is called the Velocity Zone or V-Zone, and damage in this zone was nearly absolute. Along the entire Mississippi Coast, only reinforced concrete buildings, well-built steel-frame buildings, and majestic live oak trees survived in the V-Zone. Otherwise, the storm caused miles of devastation extending hundreds of feet inland.

As the nation watched the unfolding disaster in New Orleans, Mississippi went through a rapid rescue and recovery process. Within days, rescue teams had surveyed destroyed buildings and recovered victims. National Guard and police enforced a curfew and provided security. What remained was the long recovery process. Summarizing the post-Katrina condition of Mississippi, *New York Times* journalist Jim Lewis wrote:

> Katrina hit Mississippi harder than it did Louisiana, and the destruction there was more complete. If the state has received less attention in the aftermath, that's partly because it has no coastal city the size of New Orleans and partly because it has been less politically paralyzed. (Lewis 2006, pg. 102)

Mississippi's politicians, to their credit, were anything but paralyzed. Planning to rebuild the Coast began almost immediately.

The Mississippi Renewal Forum

In early September, just days after Katrina struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast, state leaders started preparing for a planning session to direct the reconstruction of the devastated coastal region.

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[9] However, this assertion represents an infatuation with the Saffir-Simpson hurricane scale, which is solely wind-based, and not a reflection of the full reality. Older versions of the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale show expected storm surge in addition to wind speed. On the older scales, a Category 5 storm is expected to have a storm surge of 18-plus feet. Katrina's storm surge was nearly twice that number.

Leland Speed, the executive director of the Mississippi Development Authority and a well-respected real estate and securities investor, convinced Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour to invited Andrés Duany and the Congress for the New Urbanism to participate in the Mississippi Renewal Forum (Moran 2011).[10]

For the New Urbanists, the Mississippi Renewal Forum represented both an opportunity and a challenge. With wide design latitude and a regional scale, the Forum offered the New Urbanists a design venue unlike any other they had previously encountered. Moreover, Mississippi offered the New Urbanists an opportunity to avoid the criticism that they only design for the upper middle class. Professor Talen observed, "It would be impossible not to notice that most New Urbanist developments are located in relatively well-off parts of the country, and Mississippi therefore represented a very different type of venue" (Talen 2008, pg. 279).

Andrés Duany was blunt on the importance of the Mississippi Renewal Forum to the CNU. He said, "That was the highpoint…. Basically it made us extraordinarily visible" (Duany 2011). With the opportunity, came risks. Duany said, "I actually thought at the time that if we fail it will be the end of the New Urbanists. But so what? It's not like we had a choice" (Duany 2011).

The Forum was held on the second floor of the Isle of Capri casino, located on the eastern tip of Biloxi in an area called Point Cadet. The general public was not allowed in this heavily damaged area sealed by checkpoints staffed by the National Guard. The first floor of the casino had been scourged by the storm surge; access to the second floor was provided by an inoperable escalator. At the top of the escalator, a plywood door enclosed the charrette work area. Ocean Springs Mayor Connie Moran said that entering the charrette ballroom was like "the scene where Dorothy opens the door in the Wizard of Oz," as one leaves behind the devastation of the Coast and enters a large, highly organized, fully networked, and air-conditioned design studio (Moran 2011).

The Mississippi Renewal Forum was an impressive operation. Even Biloxi officials, who among Coast leaders were the most skeptical of the Forum planning process, were impressed by the Forum itself. Biloxi Mayor A. J. Holloway said that he participated in the Renewal Forum, although he was too busy to attend every session (Holloway 2011). Holloway noted that he had some differences of opinion with Duany, but Holloway described Duany as "active and vocal" and someone who was "working hard for the community" (Holloway 2011). Biloxi City Planner Jerry Creel thought the Forum was well organized, particularly given the limited time to plan it (Creel 2011).

Organized by the CNU, the Isle of Capri ballroom was divided into workstations for each of the 11 coastal cities, a double row of architects in the middle of the room for architectural design and rendering, spaces for regional planners, and a space for public relations (Duany 2011). New Urbanist planners were assigned to lead the planning efforts for each community; local architects and others

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[10] Duany says CNU member and Mississippi architect Michael Barranco was key in getting Mississippi officials to invite the CNU to the Coast (Duany 2011). Barranco was killed in an automobile accident in 2011 before this author could interview him.

volunteered for certain communities or were assigned a community.[11] The CNU firms were selected by Duany for their compatibility, and they clearly bought into Duany's brand of New Urbanism (Duany 2011). Duany was omnipresent during the design charrettes, circulating among the various teams while orchestrating the overall efforts. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Renewal Forum was run with both military precision and nearly religious fervor.

Planning Challenges

The New Urbanist planners of the Mississippi Renewal Forum faced numerous challenges: an unprecedented level of destruction; 11 distinct communities to address; a lack of community participation because many citizens had evacuated or were too busy repairing storm damage; incomplete flood maps and other missing information; and the lack of a planning culture on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

They also faced two more subtle challenges. First, the amount of physical damage was staggering— whole neighborhoods had been leveled. Subtract the debris, and much of the Coast looked like undeveloped, greenfield sites—the kind of unencumbered, "easy" sites to which the New Urbanists were accustomed. However, this proved to be an illusion.

Second, and perhaps more problematically, the New Urbanists found that their plans had competition from the collective memory of pre-Katrina conditions.

The *tabula rasa* that wasn't

One of the most commonly used phrases in the days leading to the Mississippi Renewal Forum was the phrase "blank slate." For example, *New York Times* journalist Bradford McKee wrote:

> With their hold on Gulf Coast planning, the New Urbanists face their biggest task to date. In the past, many of their developments have been built on virgin sites, or were made to replace run-down public housing in cities. Now they have large areas of 11 badly damaged towns…. to serve as **blank slates**. (McKee 2005, emphasis added)

As architect Christopher Wren discovered after the 1666 Great Fire of London, however, no amount of physical damage destroys property lines and the powerful political and social forces those lines represent. In the early twenty-first century, in the American South, the power of private property rights was particularly strong.[12]

Disaster recovery expert Gavin Smith, who served in post-Katrina Mississippi as the director of the Office of Recovery and Renewal, recognized the opportunity for innovative thinking:

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[11] Critic Michael Sorkin sarcastically writes that the teams each worked "under the supervision of a trusted apparatchik" (Sorkin 2006).   Echoing that Bolshevik theme, an early version of the Mississippi Renewal Forum website has as its logo a clinched fist grasping a pencil and an architect's triangle. The clinched fist logo was quickly replaced with a Mississippi's state flower, the magnolia.

[12] The national mood on the issue can be seen in the strong backlash against the Supreme Court's pro-eminent domain stance in Kelo v. City of New London.

"On the one hand," Smith explained, "you've got catastrophic loss. You're almost starting from scratch again; the housing stock is just gone. To some degree, you can step back and say, 'This is a chance to rebuild better than it was.'" (Lewis 2006, pp. 101-102)

However, Jim Lewis, the author of the article containing the aforementioned quote, highlighted the stubbornness of pre-disaster conditions:

A number of people involved in the Mississippi Renewal Forum referred to the Gulf Coast as a **blank slate**, but of course it wasn't, exactly. There were lives and mores at work there, which persisted even when most of the buildings were leveled. (Lewis 2006, pp. 104-105, emphasis added)

Those mores often included a sense that land is not just property but heritage. Each family wanted to keep its own parcel, and often they wanted to return to that parcel the same type of house (or other structure) that existed before the storm. The collective will of these property owners tended to make large-scale redevelopment difficult if not impossible.

In addition to property rights, memory was a powerful force which exerted enormous inertia into the process.

Memory

Much of a population's understanding of the world comes from their interactions with the physical environment—whether the sound of insects heard from a screened porch, the view from a favorite restaurant, or the familiar smells of a place of work. When an event like Katrina destroys large swaths of that environment—including homes, schools, places of worship, and businesses—people lose their bearings. This point is difficult to convey to those who have not experienced such destruction firsthand; however, the philosopher Maurice Halbwachs captured the idea:

Auguste Comte remarked that mental equilibrium was, first and foremost, due to the fact that the physical objects of our daily contact change little or not at all, providing us with an image of permanence and stability. They give us a feeling of order and tranquility, like a silent and immobile society unconcerned with our own restlessness and changes of mood. In truth, much mental illness is accompanied by a breakdown of contact between thought and things…. (Halbwachs 1980, pg. 128)

The disruption affects everyone: young and old, rich and poor, unknown or famous. After losing many of his possessions in the New Orleans flood, jazz musician Pete Fountain explained why he skipped Mardi Gras in 2006: "I think maybe it was just depression about all the stuff that happened…. All the things we lost. All the disruption. And then you look around and see all the stuff messed up. It just sort of grinds you down" (Brinkley 2007, pp. 164-5). Fountain was not alone among Katrina victims; many had trouble taking significant steps toward recovery.

Many can imagine a place being rebuilt, but they have trouble participating in the process. Bay St. Louis resident Diane Edwards Bourgeois said:

I couldn't handle this happening again. Bay St. Louis will rebuild. We know this will once again be a beautiful place. But I don't see that far. All I see is the devastation and the pain and the suffering of looking at it and remembering and coming back to it. (Koch 2010, pg. 225)

The difficulty is not just the loss, but the memory of the loss—and the knowledge that it could happen again. Rebuilding is one thing, but rebuilding in a place with a proven vulnerability is quite another. This is the anxiety that Bourgeois was expressing.

The sense of disorientation in a post-disaster environment is hard to describe. The familiar has been shattered, replaced by an alien landscape of absence and debris. In Bay St. Louis, the destruction of many neighborhoods was so complete that a volunteer organization was created to restore street signs so residents could navigate town (Koch 2010, pg. 239).

The high level of physical destruction makes the memories of the pre-disaster community very powerful. The instinct to return to normal, to put everything back as it was—to build in a time-honored fashion—all these impulses make it difficult for many to imagine what could be. CNN correspondent and Bay St. Louis native Kathleen Koch captured several phases of this dilemma:

> I started out like many on the Gulf Coast, wanting things rebuilt exactly as they had been, down to the last brick, board, and beam. But then I realized that was not just impractical, it was impossible. Construction costs were up roughly 30 percent, so rebuilding what had been was prohibitively expensive. Just as important was seizing the opportunity to not just rebuild the Mississippi Gulf Coast but to make it better. Still, I sometimes found it difficult to embrace the new, unfamiliar structures that appeared and the changing landscape they created. It meant acknowledging that the Bay St. Louis I grew up with now existed only in the memories of those who'd known and loved the town as I did. (Koch 2010, pg. 293)

First, Koch wanted her hometown to be restored to how it was—to become again the town of her memories. Next, she realized that practical matters—the lack of money and the cost of construction—made her desire an unrealizable fantasy. Understanding that she could not have her town back, she speculated on making it better. Finally, she realized that even a better Bay St. Louis would not be the town of her youth. She could not go home again, because the home she knew was gone.

Ocean Springs City Planner Eric Meyer noted that not many places—even a fast-growing city like Atlanta—are ready for the kind of change that a disaster brings (Meyer 2011).[13] Discussing the post-disaster environment, Meyer said:

> In an existing town, folks just psychologically [are not ready for big planning projects]. To heal themselves and so forth, they want everything to look the same—they want things to go back the way they were. And I get that. Everyone is fighting trauma…. So how do you get the impetus to go back differently? (Meyer 2011)

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[13] Meyer left Ocean Springs in 2012 to take a position with Gautier.

Disaster recovery experts understand the heavy imprint of pre-disaster memories of a destroyed or heavily damaged community. In their classic study on disaster recover, Haas et. al. acknowledge the power of memory: "There is already a plan for reconstruction, indelibly stamped in the perception of each resident—the plan of the pre-disaster city" (Haas, Kates and Bowden 1977, pg. 268). Often, this plan is more of an impediment than an asset:

> In general, the reconstructed city will be more familiar and less changed than inferred from the initial destruction and more safe and less vulnerable to recurrent hazard. But the achievement is inevitably less than the potential opportunity for change offered by the disaster. (Haas, Kates and Bowden 1977, pg. 263)

This is a case of the time-honored defeating the bigger and better. Disasters often present planning opportunities, because the bad is swept away with the good, and because recovery funds can make previously unachievable projects suddenly feasible financially. Rarely, though, is the opportunity fully seized, as the case studies demonstrate.

Gavin Smith concurred that opportunities to improve the built environment are rarely fully exploited, but he expanded the idea of memory-induced inertia to include other social issues:

> Communities are defined by their physical characteristics and spatial patterns of development, economic interdependencies, social bonds, and sense of place. Disasters disrupt and fracture these constructs. Thus, it is not surprising that the principal impulse after an event is to return to what is familiar – that which defined the community prior to the event – even if pre-event conditions may have been fraught with social injustice, high hazard vulnerability, inadequate housing and public infrastructure, economic fragility, and poor leadership. (Smith 2011, pg. 3)

Expectations during post-disaster recovery can easily exceed a community's ability to meet those expectations. Even though much has been destroyed, many institutions and development interests remain. Gavin Smith noted that outside designers looking to alter development patterns on the Mississippi Gulf Coast were thwarted by "entrenched development interests" (Smith 2011, pg. 13). One of this paper's case studies, the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge, provides an example of two entrenched interests—the Mississippi Department of Transportation and the CSX Corporation—determining the fate of a major redevelopment project.

However, memory and entrenched interests are not just negative forces and impediments to progress: these powerful forces can also help in the recovery process. CNN reporter Kathleen Koch attributes much of the Coast's "can do" spirit to the residents' collective memory of the recovery from Hurricane Camille in 1969 (Koch 2010, pp. 159-160). Everyone was aware, to some degree, that the Coast had rebounded in the past—and could do it again.

Most discussions of recovery centered on the physical environment, but sometimes other avenues of recovery were discussed. Tommy Longo, the mayor of Waveland—the most devastated of the 11 coastal communities—made the case that the city was its citizens, not its structures.

> Tommy bristled at those who said he was crazy to try to rebuild a city that no longer existed. "A lot of things I've heard – 'Mayor of no city,' or 'Mayor of a city that's not there.' My city is just as strong in that sense as it was before. Because I'm mayor of the people. And that's what the city of Waveland is, is its people." (Koch 2010, pg. 150)

Longo's point was that the city is intact as long as its people and their memories are intact. This opens the door for virtual conservation projects, two of which are discussed in the case studies section of this paper.

<u>Timing of the Forum</u>

Occurring just six weeks after Katrina, the Mississippi Renewal Forum took place very early in the recovery process.

Planning during post-disaster conditions is never easy. Referring to the post-Katrina planning process in New Orleans, Olshansky and Johnson said, "There is no easy way to rebuild after such devastation. Everything has to be done before everything else. Everyone is under stress, and preexisting conflicts intensify. It is complicated, confusing, and frustrating" (Olshansky and Johnson 2010, pg. 217).

Scheduling the Forum quickly was advantageous to those wishing to build bigger and better, since relatively little recovery work had taken place by that point. This was the position of Bay St. Louis Mayor Eddie Favre:

> Eddie insisted the disaster was giving the town the opportunity to redesign things to everyone's greatest benefit. Instead of another low-slung bridge with a draw span, a new Bay Bridge could soar high above boat traffic. A new beach road downtown would finally have a third lane for parking. "Don't go put something up just to solve an immediate problem," he said. "Let's look at it long-term. We don't need to rush into anything." (Koch 2010, pg. 146)

Ocean Springs mayor Connie Moran was pleased with the timing of the forum. "Some may say that it was too early, but for me it was perfect because it gave me the inspiration to push for the amenities we wanted on the bridge…. and also for planning for downtown" (Moran 2011). When asked if the timing was better for Ocean Springs because its commercial district survived Katrina relatively intact, Mayor Moran noted that Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, and Gulfport were all proceeding with projects initially contemplated during the Renewal Forum. Moran also criticized Biloxi's lack of participation in the Forum, saying they were focused on the casinos (Moran 2011).

Indeed, Biloxi officials were critical of the timing of the Forum. Biloxi mayor A. J. Holloway said, "I think it was too soon. We were still reeling…. [The Renewal Forum] came along and took a lot of time from what I thought I need to be doing" (Holloway 2011). Likewise, Biloxi City Planner Jerry Creel believed that the Forum was too early, as people were still recovering from the shock of the storm. Creel also noted some specific issues with the Forum, specifically the availability (or lack thereof) of final FEMA flood maps and the fact that displaced people were not able to participate in the charrettes. This meant

that many of the people most affected by the storm were absent from the planning sessions (Creel 2011).

For Creel, the ideal time for the Forum would have been 6-12 months after Katrina. He noted that repair permits were pulled immediately after the storm but rebuilding permits were not pulled until 3-6 months later. Major debris cleanup took four months in Biloxi, with the job not fully complete until 18 months after the storm (Creel 2011). Additional time would have given people enough time to "meet their immediate needs and start thinking clearly again" (Creel 2011). Also, some of the questions concerning funding sources would have been answered.

Ocean Springs City Planner Eric Meyer had concerns about the timing of the Forum as well. "If folks aren't ready to participate, then you are only going to have a few [people] there" (Meyer 2011). Meyer said when he was hired post-Katrina to serve as Ocean Spring's new city planner, he was told numerous times that few people had the opportunity to participate in the Renewal Forum (Meyer 2011). In Meyer's opinion, the lack of citizen participation undercut the authority of the Forum document.

Disaster recovery expert Gavin Smith noted the contradictory nature of timing a disaster recovery session such as the Mississippi Renewal Forum:

> The timing proved problematic as many citizens and community leaders were struggling to provide basic services. Yet it also provided a unique opportunity to visualize options in communities before they began the large-scale reconstruction of damaged housing, schools, and infrastructure. (Smith 2011, pg. 89)

The only way to avoid this dilemma is to pre-plan for post-disaster recovery, which was the subject of Smith's 2011 book. Significant pre-planning for post-disaster recovery did not occur in pre-Katrina Mississippi, so leaders had to choose between difficult options.

In hindsight, the process in Mississippi—while less than ideal—was significantly better than the glacial process in neighboring Louisiana, where post-disaster planning took years and arguably delayed recovery efforts. Gavin Smith credited Mississippi's ability "to link political power with good data in a timely manner" for the state's receiving more per-capita disaster recovery funds than Louisiana (Smith 2011, pg. 183).

Impact of Mississippi Renewal Forum on Coast Communities

Although the 11 Forum reports are very similar in many ways, the results on the ground vary tremendously from city to city. The variations occurred because of the different amounts of damage sustained in the each city, the different "personalities" of the cities, and the different attitudes of the cities toward the Forum.

The 11 Coastal communities are a diverse group. Biloxi City Planner Jerry Creel said, "Each of the cities has its own niche. They each have their own vision for what they want to become. It's not like one is right and one is wrong; it's just different niches" (Creel 2011). Perhaps no single course is right for every community, but that did not stop internecine squabbling. Creel said, "Of course, Biloxi receives a lot of

criticism because of the casinos. But Biloxi has always considered itself a tourist destination, and it has gone after those tourist elements" (Creel 2011).

Although Biloxi was the city most publicly critical of the Forum's plans, Creel believed that the Forum was valuable in Biloxi's recovery (Creel 2011). He said that it "planted seeds" which later grew into various projects as funds became available. Specifically, Creel noted that Tulane University was designing a boardwalk and event center (as of summer 2011) initially conceived during the Forum (Creel 2011).

However, Creel said that Biloxi was navigating a process that was new to them and having to learn to work with various government agencies and was not in a position to quickly accept all recommendations from the Forum. Biloxi was pushed to adopt the SmartCode. "There were some pieces of it we agreed with, and some pieces we didn't agree with," Creel said. He added, "Our mayor doesn't like to be pushed into anything." The New Urbanists may have been more in tune with Mississippi's architecture than its genteel culture. Referring to a spat with FEMA, Renewal Forum Chairman Jim Barksdale said, "I felt like the New Urbanists were being almost rudely pushy at a time when diplomacy would have been better" (Lewis 2006, pg. 105). General Clark Griffith, charged with Biloxi's second attempt to plan, said of the Forum, "There are some good ideas in there…. It [the Renewal Forum] kind of got off into la-la land, but that's what thinkers and people like that do" (Lewis 2006, pg. 106). The best known of the Coast cities and the location of the region's major media outlets, Biloxi is the unofficial capital of the Coast. It is not surprising that the community chose to go its own way.

After severing ties with Renewal Forum planners, Biloxi began its own planning process. In 2011, Biloxi completed its comprehensive plan, which did include elements of the SmartCode, but "with a Biloxi flavor" (Creel 2011). The new Biloxi comprehensive plan steers residential construction north of I-10 for three reasons: residents can obtain insurance, they can obtain financing, and they will be out of harm's way if another storm strikes. However, some opposition to the plan came from those already living north of I-10 who were afraid that the rural character of North Biloxi would change (Creel 2011).

Meanwhile, the area east of I-110 on the Biloxi peninsula will be redeveloped as a tourist destination (see Appendix D). Although some people have built back, Creel did not anticipate large residential developments in East Biloxi. Many families had sentimental attachment to their houses, and when those houses were destroyed, that attachment was lost and the property became a commodity that could be sold to a casino or another development interest.

Biloxi Mayor A.J. Holloway was more guarded in his opinion of the Forum's plans. "Didn't seem like it fit an old city like Biloxi" (Holloway 2011). Holloway noted that people in Biloxi liked their relatively large street fronts and were not interested in zero-lot line development (Holloway 2011). Interestingly, Holloway's criticisms of the New Urbanists' work for Biloxi—that it did not fit an "old city" like Biloxi, that is was too radical and too new—ran counter to the standard criticism of New Urbanism—that it is retrograde, backward-looking. Holloway was clearly interested in a scheme that was *more* oriented toward the time-honored than the one proposed by the New Urbanists.

Ocean Springs City Planner Eric Meyer sees the importance of the Mississippi Renewal Forum less in the document it produced for Ocean Springs but more in the process—a process that led to Meyer and other CNU members moving to the Coast to participate in the region's long-term recovery. Moreover, the initial planning process during the Forum led to additional planning. In the case of Ocean Springs, the additional planning included a new comprehensive plan and new master plans for Front Beach, Bienville Boulevard (i.e. Highway 90), and the downtown area. Firms associated with the Forum, specifically Dover, Kohl & Partners and Torti Gallas and Partners, also participated on the later master plans (Meyer 2011).

Meyer noted his experience in Atlanta, saying that the Mississippi Gulf Coast grows "incredibly slowly" by comparison. As a planner, Meyer had to recalibrate his expectations for building size and scale (Meyer 2011). Likewise, he said that the land market on the Mississippi Gulf Coast is different than it is elsewhere in the country. In other regions, land is typically considered a commodity. In Mississippi, land is often associated with a family's heritage. Assembling land for large projects, such as those shown in the Renewal Forum documents, can be problematic (Meyer 2011).

Meyer, who joined the CNU in 1996, echoes a common New Urbanist refrain by noting that downtown Ocean Springs could not be rebuilt under the current zoning code (Meyer 2011). Despite his background and CNU affiliation, Meyer was critical of several elements of the Renewal Forum's Ocean Springs plan. One of the New Urbanist's misunderstandings of Ocean Springs was the importance of the tree ordinance. Although they "penciled in" many trees, they did not understand the development limitations imposed by the ordinance, which is designed to protect live oaks and other significant trees. Looking at one dense development, Meyer called it "utter fantasy," given the number and location of existing live oak trees on the site (Meyer 2011).

Among Coast mayors, Ocean Springs Mayor Connie Moran most strongly embraced New Urbanism.[14] Of his mayor, planner Meyer said, "She bought into both the process and the product" (Meyer 2011). However, Meyer also noted that Ocean Springs did not formally adopt the Forum document because the Board of Aldermen was not as pleased as the mayor with the process and product (Meyer 2011).

Mayor Moran aggressively fought the initial Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) proposal to rebuild the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge. Changes that she and others won include improved lighting and a protected pedestrian lane. The lighting change, while subtle, can be fully appreciated when the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge is compared to the Bay St. Louis Bridge, which has standard lighting. "We were pushing for elements that we knew we had one shot to get right" (Moran 2011).

Mayor Moran had no doubts that the Forum was responsible for the success of subsequent redevelopment projects, including Fort Maurepas Park and the Front Beach walkway (Moran 2011). Referring to the Renewal Forum, Mayor Moran said, "It just inspired a lot of hope for the future, and we needed that" (Moran 2011). Enthusiastically covered by the local press—particularly the *Sun Herald*— the Mississippi Renewal Forum did indeed offer hope for a better future. For citizens living in tents or who were otherwise displaced, for those working on damaged homes, for those surrounded by piles of

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[14] After Katrina and the Renewal Forum, Moran joined the national board of directors of the CNU.

rubble, the Renewal Forum provided reassurance that the entire Coast was coming back and that individual efforts were not in vain.

Ocean Springs continued the planning process in the years following Katrina, adjusting the scale of some of the proposed projects. For example, some relatively large projects designed for the foot of the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge were dramatically downsized after the City received input from area residents. Meyer was satisfied with the scale of the newer plan, while noting that Mayor Moran preferred the larger-scale development (Meyer 2011).

In general, Moran was satisfied with the Forum planning process and the New Urbanist approach. "I thought the New Urbanist model fit well with our Gulf Coast communities. It might not fit well with larger, urban cities where modernism—that type of architecture—is [prominent]" (Moran 2011). She believed the New Urbanist design philosophy was a good fit for her town. "Ocean Springs is already New Urbanist. We have been for the last 100 years…. We have mixed use. People live close to downtown. They walk everywhere" (Moran 2011). Perhaps it is not surprising that Ocean Springs is often labeled quaint and picturesque, the same adjectives used for Seaside.

However, Mayor Moran did not believe that the Forum was universally effective. Referring to the neighboring community to the east, Gautier, she said, "If the leadership doesn't embrace the concepts, it just doesn't go anywhere" (Moran 2011).

Critical Reception

The critical reception to the Mississippi Renewal Forum mirrored previously fought battles over the validity of New Urbanism, with the Mississippi Gulf Coast simply serving as the newest battlefield.

Writing in February 2006, architectural critic Michael Sorkin said, "I happened to be in Biloxi during the CNU charrette that helped guide the development of the group's plans for the Gulf, and I found it both impressive and horrifying" (Sorkin 2006). While impressed with the organization skills of the CNU, particularly given the lack of infrastructure on the post-Katrina Coast, Sorkin had two main criticisms of the Mississippi Renewal Forum. First, he found the proposed plans too formulaic and prescriptive. Second, he believed the proposed plans failed to adequately address future storm hazards and other environmental issues.

Other critics believe the one-size-fits-all New Urbanist approach was a bad fit for the Gulf Coast:

> The forum presented its 11 plans to the 11 communities of the Gulf Coast, and many of the smaller, wealthier towns, like Ocean Springs and Pass Christian, were enthusiastic about adopting them; New Urbanism, after all, reconstructed the kind of life they'd been living all along. But Biloxi is bigger and more diverse…. (Lewis 2006, pg. 103)

Lewis's article proved prescient. Ocean Springs adopted several Forum-inspired projects, and Pass Christian passed the SmartCode. Meanwhile, Biloxi rejected the Forum recommendations and conducted its own planning process.

As Jerry Creel noted, each coast city has its niche, and it is hard to imagine similar plans working equally well across the Coast. David Perkes, an architect and director of the Gulf Coast Community Design Studio, believed that the Renewal Forum failed to adequately address the differing conditions in the 11 coastal communities. "Every single town—including towns like Moss Point, which is a small town of 10,000 people that struggles to keep even a few stores and restaurants—they were shown this downtown plan that you would think came from Cambridge, Massachusetts" (Perkes 2011). Such density, said Perkes, was unrealistic given the relatively low population on the Coast.

Other critics had concerns about the implementation of the Renewal Forum plans. "To some extent, the form-based codes now being adopted are an evolution of the design codes initially devised for greenfield projects" (Langdon 2006). Likewise:

> [Scott] Polikov doesn't favor making the code mandatory for an entire municipality. Doing so may trigger strong opposition from people who prefer a less urban style of development—thereby causing the code to be defeated, postponed for years, or watered down. (Langdon 2006)

And, in a similar vein:

> But it's one thing to build a housing subdivision on greenfield and invite prospective homeowners to buy in if they want to…. It's quite another to take a great swath of the Mississippi coast, still reeling from the largest natural disaster in American history, and suggest that the whole thing can be subject to a new sort of code. (Lewis 2006, pg. 104)

Langdon's, Polikov's, and Lewis's concerns are particularly valid in light of the political climate of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Historically, the region has no history of regional planning, only modest building code requirements, and a skeptical view of government activism.

William Morrish, a professor of architecture at the University of Virginia, complemented the way the Mississippi Renewal Forum addressed transportation issues, but he criticized what he saw as the imposition of traditional architectural styles. "A particular style does not promote a certain kind of sustainability or democracy…. You can't approach building a city like it's a 30-acre development" (McKee 2005). Despite seeing some success on regional transportation issues, Morrish believed that the New Urbanists were stuck—in Talen's terms—in the Planned Community culture.

A December 8, 2005, article in *The New York Times* by Bradford McKee and the subsequent CNU response is illustrative of the pre-fabricated niches into which much of the Mississippi Renewal Forum debate fell. Much of McKee's article focused on the opinions of Andrea Harris, a homeowner who feared losing her house to a golf course development. In the article, CNU proposals for the beach and other areas of Biloxi were conflated into a phantom development that is menacing the innocent homeowner; Ms. Harris was worried about a proposal that did not exist. McKee's narrative disingenuously failed to correct this misperception.

Following the New Urbanist protocol of aggressively challenging criticism, John Norquist and Stephen Filmanowicz responded to the McKee article with a lengthy editorial in the *Sun Herald*. Norquist and Filmanowicz correctly identified the factual sloppiness of McKee's article. However, they also re-engaged with the perennial New Urbanist debates of the Starchitect versus the Collective and the CNU versus the academy (Norquist and Filmanowicz 2005). By expanding the debate beyond the issue at hand, Norquist and Filmanowicz come across as shrill and thin-skinned. This is one of many instances of counterproductive New Urbanist declarations in the press, which had the cumulative effect of making the CNU look reactionary and unwilling to accept criticism—or change.

Some critics question the value of urban planning in general. Emily Talen acknowledged potential difficulties with plan-making. "Critics contend that whoever is in control of plan design and imagery will have an unfair advantage. Plans, especially flowery, colorful images, can be seen as a form of propaganda that are in themselves a form of control" (Talen 2005, pg. 136). The images created during the Renewal Forum, stylistically coordinated across all 11 teams, portrayed a revitalized Coast rendered in soft water colors, at once new and familiar.[15]

Critic Kenneth Kolson was also skeptical of large-scale planning efforts. Examining what he derisively called "Big Plans," Kolson said, "Nor is it the point…. that people should cease to dream. The point is that those wishing to implement their dreams should proceed with caution, and on their own nickel" (Kolson 2001, pg. 12). The Mississippi Renewal Forum certainly was not cautious—in a week's time, the charrettes produced work which continues to influence the development of the Coast. As far as working on their own nickel, the New Urbanists were reimbursed for travel and other business expenses, but they did not earn design fees for the Renewal Forum (Duany 2011).[16]

Some criticism of the Forum is pragmatic and constructive. For example, disaster recovery expert Gavin Smith recommends that the New Urbanists consider adding an "H Transect" to their form-based codes, a new designation for areas subject to natural hazards (Smith 2011, pg. 90). This is sound advice, and implementing the "H Transect" in form-based code schemes such as the SmartCode would address the criticism that the New Urbanists ignored known risk factors when planning the Coast's redevelopment.

In a similarly pragmatic mode, Smith, an advocate for pre-planning for post-disaster recovery, suggested that designers and recovery professionals meet before disaster strikes:

> The participation of the Congress for the New Urbanism in the Mississippi Renewal Forum after Hurricane Katrina represents one of the boldest experiments in recent history to involve professional associations in post-disaster recovery. Among the most important lessons to be derived from that experience, however, is that relationships between design professionals and other members of the assistance network need to be developed *before* an event. Furthermore, the effort to provide architectural assistance could be enhanced by a better understanding of

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[15] Architect David Perkes argues that the New Urbanists' renderings commercialized the region's historic architecture (Perkes 2011).

[16] Many firms that participated in the Renewal Forum returned to perform additional planning work and were compensated for subsequent projects. Local architects who participated in the Renewal Forum received no compensation.

how existing recovery programs operate and how design options relate to local conditions, including pre-existing hazard vulnerability and settlement patterns. (Smith 2011, pg. 113)

Again, this criticism is interesting because it is contrary to the standard line that the New Urbanists are too concerned with the time-honored. Smith argued that the New Urbanists should have been *more* in tune with the pre-disaster Mississippi Gulf Coast—specifically its "hazard vulnerability and settlement patterns"—before launching their design charrettes.

In summary, critics of the Renewal Forum (and planning in general) say:

- The one-size-fits-all approach did not serve all 11 Coast communities equally well;
- The New Urbanists were not well prepared to address regional issues;
- Planning represents power, and this power should be used carefully.

Case Studies

The Mississippi Renewal Forum was a planning exercise, which led to additional planning and numerous projects—some built, some unbuilt, and some virtual. This paper now examines a series of case studies, all of which (except one) have direct connections to the Renewal Forum.

These case studies were selected because they all engage the twin directives of the Renewal Forum— building in a time-honored manner and building in a bigger and better manner. The relative successes and failures of the case study projects illuminate the difficulty of conceiving projects that attempt to be both past-oriented and future-oriented.

Canonical Historic Preservation: Jefferson Davis's Beauvoir (see Appendix E)

Discussed during the Mississippi Renewal Forum but not addressed directly in the Forum document, Beauvoir is an important piece of Biloxi's heritage, and understanding its restoration is critical to understanding the wider conservation context on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.[17]

Coastal Mississippi has a culture and history that are distinct from the other regions of the state. *New York Times* correspondent Jennifer Steinhauer succinctly captured this distinctiveness:

The historically rich, laid back, slightly tawdry Mississippi coast has always stood apart from the otherwise largely provincial state. With its French colonial history, the coast has carried few of the historical burdens wrought by cotton plantations, slaves and the civil rights movement. (Steinhauer 2006)

While the Coast does stand apart, it also has a few Confederates in the attic. Perhaps no structure on the Mississippi Gulf Coast is more representative of bygone days than Beauvoir, the retirement home of Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy. Owned by the Mississippi Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the pre-Katrina Beauvoir complex included the antebellum home, the cottage

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[17] One of the CNU planners on the Biloxi project, Stefanos Polyzoides, confirmed that the fate of Beauvoir was discussed during and after the Renewal Forum (Polyzoides 2012).

where Davis wrote his two-volume memoir *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, a replica soldier's barracks, the director's home, and the Jefferson Davis Presidential Library.

Like much Coast architecture, Beauvoir was not spared by Katrina. Gulf Coast historian Charles L. Sullivan said that Katrina destroyed much of Coast's heritage. About Beauvoir, Sullivan said it "looks like it's been butchered" and "[i]t just looks like it's been blown to pieces" (Pettus 2005).[18] Sullivan's militaristic language suggests that Beauvoir was the victim of a Civil War battle, not a tropical storm.

The feeling of loss along the Coast was deep. Referring to Grasslawn, a historic house in Gulfport, a Coast citizen said, "You can construct a building and say this is how Grasslawn looked…. But you can't ever bring back the original building and the history that goes with it. That was our heritage. And it is lost" (Lipton 2006). In the early days after Katrina, the sense of loss was absolute—the heritage was gone, and nothing was going to bring it back.

Heritage and historic preservation efforts can evoke powerful feelings. Daniel Bluestone compared architectural history, with its origins in the academy and its concern with form and aesthetics, with historic preservation. About the latter, Bluestone said:

> Historical preservation originated in a different sensibility, one most often bound up with the sentimental, emotional, and associational power of particular places. With origins in the nineteenth century, preservation often turned on an axis of nationalism and nostalgia. (Bluestone 1999/2000, pg. 301)

The American South is arguably the nation's most distinct region, culturally and politically (Leopold 2012). Much of the region's heritage is tied to the Civil War, when secessionists sought to cleave the South from the rest of the Union. Civil War figures continue to interest history buffs, those who are politically aligned to the philosophy of state's rights, or those who long nostalgically for "old times that are not forgotten."

Beauvoir is an example of a classic canonical historic preservation project: a house museum dedicated to the life of a famous person. Although Beauvoir is an attractive structure, its value is cemented by its association with Jefferson Davis. Preserving the houses of famous people, usually men, is the oldest driver of preservation efforts in the United States (Whitehill 1966).

Jefferson Davis is widely regarded as an important figure in U.S. history, and not simply for his role during the Civil War. Rick Forte, chairman of the Mississippi Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, noted that in addition to serving as the only president of the Confederacy, Davis served many other important roles: war hero during the Mexican-American War, U.S. senator, and Secretary of War under Franklin Pierce (Jensen 2006). [19]

The restoration of Beauvoir post-Katrina was not without controversy. Mississippi Senator and Senate Appropriations Chair Thad Cochran proposed an $80 million bill to repair storm-damaged historic

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[18] This was an emotional initial reaction; others were glad to find Beauvoir relatively intact (Jensen 2006).
[19] Similar statements about Davis's career appear elsewhere.

properties, including Beauvoir. Cochran's press secretary said, "These funds are important to ensure the full economic and cultural recovery of the coast" (Radelet 2006). Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma objected to the bill, saying funds for housing the displaced should take priority. Also objecting to the bill, Mississippi NAACP President Derrick Johnson said, "We adamantly oppose the restoration of Beauvoir. It is one of the most divisive symbols in this state and in this state's history" (Radelet 2006). Johnson also stated that funds should be prioritized for those who lost homes (Jensen 2006).

The controversy surrounding the restoration of Beauvoir was limited, however. First, most people were too busy in post-Katrina Mississippi to participate in the debate. Second, and possibly more importantly, the restoration of Beauvoir was a *fait accompli*. "[L]isted by the National Park Service as a National Historic Landmark, the highest ranking, it will be among those first in line for federal restoration money" (Williams 2005). The battle for the restoration of Beauvoir had been fought and won before Katrina damaged the house: landmark status virtually ensured at least partial federal funding for the restoration.[20]

While the Beauvoir house was restored along canonical lines, other elements on the property were rebuilt in a bigger and better manner. For example, the new Jefferson Davis Presidential Library has been moved above flood elevation and is designed to resist hurricane-force winds. To enhance the visitor experience while improving operations, several functions, including the gift shop, were consolidated into the new library.

However, this is not to say that changes to the library or other innovations on the site really represent a change of thinking concerning Beauvoir, its owner, and their joint legacy. The aforementioned changes are simply pragmatic moves in a facility that is otherwise oriented strictly toward the time-honored. This was at least tacitly acknowledged by the Renewal Forum document, which by ignoring Beauvoir confirmed that no major changes should take place on the historic property.

The Limits of Turning Back Time: Point Cadet (see Appendix D)

In contrast to Beauvoir, East Biloxi, particularly the Point Cadet area, was one of the focal points of Renewal Forum planning in Biloxi.

Point Cadet consisted of a series of neighborhoods of small, modest, relatively decent houses. Historically, the Front Beach and the Bay were lined with marinas and seafood factories. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the seafood industry went through a period of long decline. The legalization of dockside gambling in 1990 accelerated this decline, and many of the remaining waterfront factories were demolished to make way for a series of casinos. Housing in the area, originally built for workers in the seafood industry, remained.

After Katrina, the City of Biloxi focused on reopening the damaged casinos, which were seen as the city's essential economic engines. In contrast, members of the CNU team, including Duany and the planning

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[20] Davis's state's rights legacy is still a powerful idea in conservative areas like the Mississippi Gulf Coast—an idea that is conveniently shelved when federal funds are needed for disaster recovery.

firm Moule and Polyzoides, emphasized traditional neighborhood design, walkability, and a public transportation network.

Although many feared that casinos and condos would displace the Point Cadet's neighborhoods, this turned out to be unfounded for reasons unknowable in 2005. First, the expansion of the casino industry stalled, as the Mississippi gaming market had become saturated. Second, the Great Recession killed the nascent second-home condominium market on the Mississippi Coast.

The real enemy of Point Cadet's traditional neighborhoods was FEMA, or to be more fair, geography. East Biloxi is low and surrounded on three sides by water. Hurricane Katrina's storm surge covered the eastern tip of Biloxi from the beach to the bay, dramatically demonstrating the peninsula's vulnerability to catastrophic flooding. After assessing the devastation, FEMA raised design flood elevations all along the Coast, including East Biloxi. This effectively outlawed traditional neighborhood design in Point Cadet, while assuring that what was built back would be bigger and better—or at least taller and (supposedly) more storm resistant. The CNU team battled this decision, but it was in FEMA's hands. *New York Times* journalist Jim Lewis wrote, "To Moule and Polyzoides…. the new elevation maps effectively spelled the end of Biloxi, at least in any recognizable form" (Lewis 2006, pg. 106).

The Renewal Forum planning of Point Cadet represented a failure of the New Urbanist planners to understand the limits of the time-honored. What Point Cadet once had been was rendered obsolete (and essentially illegal) by new regulations. Unable to adjust to this reality, Moule and Polyzoides resigned from the Biloxi project, airing their concerns with the process in a letter excerpted in the *Sun Herald* (Newsom 2006).[21]

As of May 2012, much of East Biloxi is vacant lots. The area's future has not been decided, but whatever it becomes will be dramatically different than what it was.

Incrementally Better: The Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge (see Appendix F)

Hurricane Katrina smashed the old Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge, dumping large segments of the concrete structure into the bay. The bridge, part of Highway 90, was a major transportation artery between the eastern Mississippi Gulf Coast and the central commercial core of the Coast. The bridge also served as an important visual element across Biloxi Bay, especially as viewed from the Front Beach section of Ocean Springs.

Relocating the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge was one of the most important planning proposals to emerge from the Mississippi Renewal Forum. New Urbanist and other planners proposed relocating the bridge from its existing location to the location of the CSX rail bridge. Moving the entire CSX rail line to a northern route away from coastal communities had been a long-term goal of Coast residents, and the New Urbanists seized that goal. However, forces beyond the Renewal Forum prevented the relocation of the rail line.

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[21] Technically, Moule and Polyzoides did not resign because they had not been officially hired. However, unlike many of the other New Urbanist firms working on the Coast, Moule and Polyzoides were not part of continuing post-Forum planning efforts.

One of those forces was the politically powerful Mississippi Department of Transportation, which had a design for the new bridge ready before Katrina struck. Based solely on projected traffic counts, the MDOT bridge was not sympathetic to the Renewal Forum's proposals for Biloxi or Ocean Springs, nor was it sympathetic to pedestrian and bicycle access (Pender 2005).

The debate was not just between the New Urbanists and MDOT, however—the towns at opposite ends of the bridge had different visions of the future:

> Everyone wants it rebuilt as soon as possible. But officials on one side of the bridge—those in Biloxi—favor a large, multilane structure that can accommodate casino workers and the new horde of gamblers. On the other side, in Ocean Springs, officials want to restore the four-lane drawbridge that once spanned the bay, hoping to keep their French-colonized, tree-lined town the definition of quaint. (Steinhauer 2006)

Put simply, Biloxi wanted the bridge and the traffic while Ocean Springs did not. Summarizing Biloxi's attitude, Biloxi Mayor A.J. Holloway said, "I don't care if it's six lanes or four lanes.... I just want that bridge back, right where it was in the same footprint, as quickly as possible" (Schaper 2005). This contrasts directly with Ocean Springs Mayor Connie Moran, who was willing to wait for a redesign which included more amenities.

However, the design timeline was not in the hands of Biloxi, the New Urbanists, or Mayor Moran—the response of CSX to the hurricane cemented the fate of the Renewal Forum proposal. With the help of insurance money, CSX repaired both their Biloxi Bay and Bay St. Louis bridges by February 2006. At that point, the window for relocating the rail line had closed, and the Renewal Forum proposal was rendered moot.[22]

At first impression, it looks as if MDOT and Biloxi built the exact bridge they wanted. *Sun Herald* journalist Geoff Pender wrote, "So far, Moran has won only minor concessions, including MDOT's promise to include a pedestrian-bike lane, a walkway underneath its Ocean Springs landing and decorative lighting and concrete" (Pender 2005). This is misleading, though. What Pender terms as "only minor concessions" actually turn out to be quite important. The pedestrian and bike lane, separated from traffic by a safety barrier, is popular and heavily used. The lighting change, while subtle, is significant—this becomes obvious when the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge is compared to its fraternal twin, the Bay St. Louis Bridge. Furthermore, MDOT initially wanted the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge to return to grade one-half mile inland. Mayor Moran insisted that the bridge come to grade near the shore, which significantly reduced the bridge's visual footprint in town (Moran 2011).

The MDOT plan called for a higher center span to replace the old drawbridge configuration. This, combined with true break-down lanes, results in a safer bridge.

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[22] The estimated cost of relocating the rail line north, away from coastal communities, was $795 million (Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding & Renewal 2005, pg. 30), a staggering amount of money even in the context of post-Katrina recovery funds.

The final bridge was certainly bigger and arguably better—perhaps not better in the sense of the ideal bridge, but better in the sense of what could have been. As far the time-honored, the new bridge is located on the footprint of the old bridge. Viewed from the Front Beach area of Ocean Springs, the visual impact of the new bridge—though taller—is not significantly greater than the visual impact of the old bridge.

The dissatisfying aspect of the bridge debate is two-fold. First, the New Urbanists planners at the Mississippi Renewal Forum spent all of their design efforts on relocating the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge to the CSX right-of-way. When that proved impossible, a large portion of both the Biloxi and Ocean Springs plans was rendered moot—there were no alternate Renewal Forum proposals. Second, MDOT's large but uninspired bridge design was presented as a take-it-or-leave-it final design. Only grudgingly did MDOT accept modest revisions to the design.

A more explicit debate surrounding the bridge—including the bridge's history, its visual impact on the towns it connects, and so forth—could have led to a more inspiring final design.

Virtual Conservation: *Vanished Mississippi Gulf Coast* and *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods* (See Appendix G)

While canonical historic preservation is concerned with physically restoring an object to an earlier condition—usually the initial condition or the condition of the object during an important historic event—the discipline of Critical and Strategic Conservation is open to alternate preservation techniques. Sometimes, the conservation effort is focused on remembering the object, not necessarily rebuilding or reconstructing it.

Vanished Mississippi Gulf Coast and *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods* represent two of many virtual conservation projects. Different in inspiration, purpose, and format, these two specific books share an explicit desire to preserve some aspect of the past.

Author Jim Fraiser and photographer Rick Guy conceived *Vanished Mississippi Gulf Coast* in 2004, when a series of hurricanes struck Florida. The book has no direct connection to the Mississippi Renewal Forum.

Modest in its aspirations and achievement, *Vanished Mississippi Gulf Coast* nonetheless provides a glimpse of the pre-Katrina Mississippi Gulf Coast. Jim Fraiser writes:

> Upon observing predictions that we were mired in a thirty-year cycle of more frequent and destructive hurricanes, I became concerned that my beloved Mississippi coast was due for another Camille-like hurricane that would devastate the region…. I asked Pelican [a publisher] to allow us to revisit the coast **and preserve for posterity its history, architecture, and culture** as it had developed since the French landed….
>
> We finished the project just in time. Rick was taking his final photographs when Katrina struck. (Fraiser 2006, pg. 9, emphasis added)

One immediately notices that the author was not conceiving his project as simply publishing a book. Rather, he conceived the project as preserving "for posterity" the Coast's "history, architecture, and culture." Without equivocation, the author assumed that a book can accomplish this rather momentous task.

Vanished Mississippi Gulf Coast contains six main chapters, one each dedicated to Ocean Springs, Pascagoula, Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian, and Bay St. Louis. Each chapter is subdivided into segments addressing history, architecture, and culture. Photographs show both pre- and post-Katrina conditions—usually one or the other for each subject, but sometimes both. Because each subject is covered by a maximum of two images, the book simply provides a series of snapshots of iconic Coast buildings supported by mostly superficial narration.

A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods is much more sophisticated in its approach and ambitions. Published online and distributed for free at home improvement stores, the *Pattern Book* was intended for a wide audience. In fact, one could argue that it was the most direct conduit of ideas from the Mississippi Renewal Forum to the average Coast citizen.

An indication of the pattern book's ambitions is the preface, written by Governor Haley Barbour. He wrote:

> As a result of the leadership of the Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal and the efforts of many talented professionals, *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods* is now available. This valuable tool marks a new beginning in the rebuilding efforts of our residents and businesses throughout the Gulf Coast region. While many of our most loved places have disappeared, **we are compelled to rebuild the Coast in a time-honored way. To ensure that this effort is properly performed, I urge builders to use this pattern book** in their efforts. It will not only result in beautiful buildings, but also strong and well-protected homes and businesses. (Urban Design Associates 2005, italics regularized and emphasis added)

The emphasized text above begs the question: compelled by whom or by what? Because the question is not explicitly answered, one must conclude that tradition is the compelling force. This proposition is reinforced by the next sentence, in which the word *properly* implies there exists a right way and a wrong way to build. Tradition provides the means of distinguishing the two.

Using illustrations from the Mississippi Gulf Coast and other Southern cities, prototype plans, and numerous details, *A Pattern Book for Gulf Coast Neighborhoods* ostensibly represents a return to yesteryear, but it is a carefully constructed version of the past. As Lowenthal noted:

> The unadulterated past is seldom sufficiently ancient or glorious; most heritages need ageing and augmenting. Individually and collectively we revise the inherited past to enhance self-esteem, to aggrandize property, to validate power. (Lowenthal 1985, pg. 325)

For example, when the Coast fails to provide a sufficiently charming cottage or streetscape, one is borrowed from Natchez. These kinds of decisions are clearly constructions.

The paradox of both building in a time-honored manner while building bigger and better leads to some muddled thinking, such as this sentence from the *Pattern Book*: "The Mississippi Renewal Forum has developed concepts for rebuilding towns and cities in **new** ways but as **traditiona**l urban environments" (Urban Design Associates 2005, pg. I, italics regularized, emphasis added). This is clarified, but not explicitly. The proposed "new ways" are using transects from the SmartCode and responding to FEMA regulations. The "traditional urban environment" will be created by the use of transects to emulate historic neighborhoods and by building following the *Pattern Book*, which is a style manual of traditional architectural forms.

Arguably, well-designed traditional structures are rare on the rebuilt Mississippi Coast. Despite the presence of the *Pattern Book*, most homeowners built generic houses of relatively low quality, building as large as they could afford (Meyer 2011). In many instances, "bigger not better" prevailed. In any case, it was unlikely that many homeowners would have the funds or access to the carpentry skills needed to execute the traditional architecture shown in the *Pattern Book* (Perkes 2011).

Parolek et. al. noted that form-based codes can have varying degrees of architectural standards—from detailed architectural standards to no architectural standards (Parolek, Parolek and Crawford 2008, pg. 78).[23] The authors further noted that this kind of regulation should be carefully considered (Parolek, Parolek and Crawford 2008, pg. 86). The *Pattern Book*, of course, was advisory, not compulsory, but its publication in late 2005 did set a precedent for forthcoming form-based codes, suggesting that architectural design can and should be more strictly regulated.

With the potential influence of *A Pattern Book* rendered mostly moot by cost and skills concerns, both of the discussed publications are more past-oriented than future-oriented. In the case of the *Pattern Book*, the documented past was highly constructed. Nonetheless, the *Pattern Book* may be more valuable as a document of pre-Katrina conditions than as a tool for post-Katrina recovery.

Time-honored *and* bigger and better: Fort Maurepas Park (see Appendix H)

Renewal Forum planning for Ocean Springs inspired the series of decisions that lead to the creation of Fort Maurepas Park, the complete history of which requires some explanation.

On April 8, 1699, a French expedition led by Pierre LeMoyne, Sieur d'Iberville, started the construction of a wooden fort in Old Biloxi, now Ocean Springs, Mississippi. With this fort, christened Fort Maurepas, d'Iberville hoped to cement France's claim to the Mississippi River and all areas drained by its tributaries—in other words, much of what is now the continental United States.

D'Iberville departed for France in May, leaving a garrison of 86 men to hold the fort and much of North America. The English and Spanish never arrived in force, but the garrison had to contend with "insects (gnats and mosquitoes), snakes, alligators, disease (especially yellow fever), and the paucity of drinking water" and, inexplicably, an abundance of alcohol (Bellande, Fort Maurepas & French Colonial 1699 -

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[23] Any form-based code will have at least minimal architectural impact.

1811 n.d.). The French abandoned Fort Maurepas in 1702, either dismantling it or burning it to the ground.

Over the years, Fort Maurepas was the object of much speculation and occasional amateur archaeology. In 1973, the Mississippi Department of Archives & History (MDAH) launched a serious effort to locate the historic fort, which led to the eventual reconstruction, completed in 1981.

As the narrative above suggests, Fort Maurepas was never truly forgotten. A core of enthusiasts kept the memory of the fort alive, but in a tentative, highly personalized way. To address the collective memory of Fort Maurepas, an architectural presence was needed. About architecture, John Ruskin wrote, "We may live without her, and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her" (Ruskin 1989, pg. 178). For Ruskin, the greatest achievement of a building is associated with memory: "[F]or it is in becoming memorial or monumental that a true perfection is attained" (Ruskin 1989, 178-179). Ruskin added, "Better the rudest work that tells a story or records a fact, than the richest without meaning" (Ruskin 1989, pg. 183).

This is not to suggest that Ruskin would see anything of value in a replica of a wood fort. "[I]t is *impossible*, as impossible as to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture" (Ruskin 1989, pg. 194). Ruskin would probably find a replica even less appealing that a restoration.

Not all writers are as negative toward reconstructions. Lowenthal noted that: "The wider public, however, unabashedly enjoys reconstructions. Few have the taste or the training to appreciate the past simply from fragmentary remains. Heaps of fallen stones convey nothing to the ordinary spectator; only reconstitution makes them coherent and evocative" (Lowenthal 1985, pp. 280-282). Because they are tangible and visceral, reconstructions provide an imaginative framework that ruins or empty sites cannot provide. Fort Maurepas enthusiasts recognized this power.

In their sympathetic treatment of reconstructed archaeological sites, Peter Stone and Philippe Planel made the following point, "The past in fact cannot be re-constructed as it actually happened, but rather it is continually constructed by individuals or groups who, for whatever reason, choose to interact with it" (Stone and Planel 1999, pg. 1). Stone and Planel noted that modern tourists enjoy and expect visible and tangible exhibits. (Stone and Planel 1999, pg. 6). Although individual "constructions" of the meaning of a particular site and individual expectations of what a site might provide will vary, shared experiences at reconstructed sites do contribute to a community's collective memory.

The danger of a reconstructed—or in Stone and Planel's terms, a "constructed" site—is a student or another visitor leaving with a false impression of what is original and what is newly constructed. However, Stone and Planel see "constructed" sites as being potentially advantageous: "By making students aware that the sites are *experimental*, and that they are not definitive models of what it was like in the past, teachers at all levels of education can develop discussion on the nature of evidence and on the nature of the past itself" (Stone and Planel 1999, pg. 7). These authors see the opportunity to work with "experimental" archaeology as potentially "life-enhancing," particularly for young students (Stone and Planel 1999, pg. 12). Summarizing this point, it is better for students to engage with the

past—even if they misinterpret some particular point—than to ignore the past and the heritage associated with it.

Likewise, Marion Blockley saw the educational potential of reconstructions: "Reconstructions are an invaluable way of reaching and inspiring different sections of the community—whether for commercial, political or didactic reasons. However, they are a powerful tool and need to be used with integrity and imagination" (Blockley 1999, pg. 31). Ocean Springs historian Ray Bellande expressed concern that some of the elements of the annual 1699 Landing festival are conveyed as historical, when in fact they are fanciful (Bellande, Phone Interview 2011). Both Blockley and Bellande saw the value of reconstructions, but they cautioned against their indiscriminate use.

Regardless of the questions surrounding the authenticity of the replica fort, it was desired by Ocean Springs as a way of cementing the town's position on the Coast, particularly in relation to its rival across Biloxi Bay. Kat Bergeron neatly encapsulated the rivalry between Ocean Springs and Biloxi and the importance of Fort Maurepas to that rivalry.

> Ocean Springs, as France's first post, has much to crow about, though people haven't always listened because of a quirk in naming. Iberville called this first site "Biloxi," after a friendly tribe of Native Americans. Later, when "New Biloxi" was built across the bay in what is present-day Biloxi, the original Fort Maurepas site became "Old Biloxi." That was eventually changed to "Ocean Springs" to reflect abundant spring waters. It's easy to see how this name game set the stage for confusion.
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> **To reaffirm its place in history**, Ocean Springs built a replica of Iberville's Fort Maurepas, but could not do so at the original site, which likely is underwater and in an exclusive neighborhood. (Bergeron, Ocean Springs, please shoot those cannons 1999, emphasis added)

The people of Ocean Springs understood that their claim to the events of 1699—their cultural memory of the first European settlement of the region—would be best confirmed and anchored by a physical monument with prestige and presence.

Or so they thought.

Rarely visited and never loved, Fort Maurepas fell victim to termites and the bored youth of Ocean Springs, who remorselessly vandalized the structure. Local leaders struggled with the fate of Fort Maurepas, and their procrastination was rewarded in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina destroyed the fort, providing the city with a proverbial clean slate. Now, the fort could be reconsidered, and FEMA would provide the funding.

Because of Ocean Springs's relatively high elevation, the city was less damaged by Katrina than neighboring Coast cities. However, beach front property was nearly universally destroyed, numerous families were left homeless, and the quiet elegance of the town was shattered, all of which are deeply disturbing, leading to a fracturing of the community's collective memory.

Created before Katrina to raise funds to complete the fort, the Fort Maurepas Foundation advocated post-Katrina for the reconstruction of the fort with FEMA funds. Unlike an individual, a group "does not stop with a mere display of its unhappiness, a momentary burst of indignation and protest. It resists with all the force of its tradition, which have effect" (Halbwachs 1980, pg. 134). The desired effect did not come, however, as forces advocating for redeveloping the site as a park were stronger and thus triumphed.[24] The new plan was presented as more "user friendly" and more accessible to the public (Norman 2006). Rather than rebuilding the fort, the footprint of the fort would be represented by a lawn edged with stone walls.

In Lowenthal's terms, the Fort Maurepas replica was a *duplicate* while Fort Maurepas Park represents a *copy*:

> Like duplicates, copies celebrate or call to mind aspects of the past; unlike duplicates, they aim at no strict fidelity to their models, and often intentionally depart from them in scale, materials, dimension, or form. Unlike emulations, however, copies mainly follow and reflect the past. Both their resemblances to and their differences from their models affect our perception of the originals. (Lowenthal 1985, pg. 301)

Lowenthal added, "The present pejorative meaning of 'copy' is of relatively recent origin. During antiquity, copying was not distinguished from creative innovation" (Lowenthal 1985, pg. 301). As discussed earlier, this point is the crux of the debate between Modernists and Traditionalists (including many New Urbanists).

After Katrina, the remaining fragments of the replica fort were cleared and the site was prepared for the new park. To mark the location of the replica fort, the outline of fort is represented by "foundation walls" designed to represent the footprint of the original fort as closely as possible. The material for the foundation walls is stone, however, which was not present in either the original fort or its faithful duplicate. Interestingly, the form of the fort is most clearly viewed from the air: pre- and post-Katrina Google Earth images of the site are remarkably similar (see Appendix H).

Today, Fort Maurepas Park is more used and appreciated than the replica fort ever was. Instead of a rarely visited tourist attraction, today's park is an integral part of the town. Ocean Springs Board of Aldermen meeting minutes show some of the uses of the park. In May 2011, the Board approved a concert series and a vendor for the concerts (Ferguson, May 25th 2011 minutes). In July 2011, the Board discussed a policy for non-profits to rent the park (Ferguson, July 5th 2011 minutes).

Ocean Springs is a town of festivals and pageants. The most important are Mardi Gras, the Peter Anderson Festival, and the 1699 Landing. Each of these has qualities of the Kinetic City, which "is perceived not as architecture, but in terms of spaces which hold associative values and supportive lives" (Mehrotra 2008). Each event physically modifies the city, whether with the moving floats of Mardi Gras, the display booths of Peter Anderson, or the costumed pageant of the 1699 Landing.

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[24] Historian Ray Bellande attributes the idea for a park to Mayor Moran (Bellande, Phone Interview 2011). Bellande himself may have been critical to convincing the public that a new replica was not needed.

After a brief post-Katrina hiatus, the 1699 Landing takes place every April along Front Beach. Typical of Coast festivals, the 1699 Landing is a collection of events very loosely connected to local French heritage. Scheduled 2012 events include a ball, a block party with "music and entertainment," a 5K run, a mass at St. Alphonsus Catholic Church ("Landing Participants in Full Dress Attire!"), a tentative arts and crafts festival, a two-day regatta, a children's pet parade, an art contest, the Landing reenactment, and fireworks (1699 Historical Society 2011). In addition to a list of the events, the 1699 Historical Society's website has a section on history (which shows a 19th century schooner, implying it is somehow connected to d'Iberville). The website also includes a series of rather pale "Native Americans," appropriately dressed for the Great Plains and compliancy with public nudity laws (the authentic dress of the native inhabitants of the Gulf Coast was rather minimal).

Fort Maurepas Park represents a creative compromise between the time-honored and the bigger and better. It celebrates the community's heritage while being an integral part of the community's present and future.

Conclusion

The discussed case studies illustrate some of many possible approaches to balancing past-oriented and future oriented design philosophies. The following chart summarizes the case studies, listing some of their "time-honored qualities" and their "bigger and better qualities":

Case Study	Time-Honored Qualities	Bigger and Better Qualities
Beauvoir	The main house has been meticulously restored.	New presidential library has been moved above flood elevation and is designed to resist hurricane-force winds.
Point Cadet	Some residents are rebuilding in their historic neighborhoods.	FEMA regulations require houses to be elevated, which makes them more storm resistant but at the same time changes the character of neighborhoods.
Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge	The new bridge occupies the same basic footprint of the old bridge. The new bridge returns to grade near the waterfront in Ocean Springs, much like the old bridge did.	The new bridge is taller, accommodating boats without requiring a drawbridge, and is less susceptible to storm surge. The new bridge is wider and can accommodate more traffic.[25] The wider bridge includes a separate bicycle and pedestrian lane, which is regularly used.
Vanishing Mississippi Gulf Coast	A series of photographs capture pre-Katrina conditions.	N/A

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[25] The New Urbanists and others argued that a larger bridge was unnecessary and would be a detriment.

A Pattern Book	Drawings and photographs convey a speculative record of the Coast's architecture.	Few buildings have been built using the *Pattern Book*, so its influence has been limited.
Fort Maurepas Park	The outline of the replica fort has been incorporated into the park.	The new park is very popular with local residents and is used much more than the replica fort.

Each of the four built projects had to negotiate between the time-honored and the bigger and better.

Beauvoir is the project most closely associated with the time-honored. The motivating force behind the project was replacing what was lost: fidelity to the past was the primary motivator. Even here, though, the bigger and better had a place—the Jefferson Davis presidential library was completely redesigned both to function better and to be more storm resistant.

Point Cadet represents the permanent loss of the time-honored. Much of this residential district was destroyed by Katrina. Those who could not immediately rebuild faced new FEMA regulations (and, one could argue, common sense) which stated that new houses must be raised to reduce risk from future storm surges.

The Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge represents a missed opportunity. Essentially an off-the-shelf design, the Biloxi-Ocean Springs Bridge was tweaked for the better as a result of input from the Mississippi Renewal Forum. Unfortunately, the bridge's essential design was finalized by MDOT engineers prior to the Forum, in a vacuum isolated from public input. As a result, the aspirations for the bridge started low, which proved challenging for those who saw the bridge's aesthetic and cultural potential.

Both *Vanishing Mississippi Gulf Coast* and *A Pattern Book* focus on the past—the time-honored. *Vanishing Mississippi Gulf Coast* was conceived to document (as it turned out) the pre-Katrina Coast; it has no aspirations of doing anything further. Although *A Pattern Book* was designed to influence future construction, its limited application will mean that it will serve more as a reference guide to the past than a roadmap to the future. Thus, both of these virtual conservation projects are firmly rooted in the past.

Fort Maurepas Park is a success and a valuable example of a community honoring its heritage while building for the future. The park seamlessly serves as both a daily recreation spot and the backdrop for the 1699 Festival. The community had the courage to abandon the destroyed replica fort and focus its energies on actual community needs.

The super-charged design environment of post-disaster recovery offers opportunities to examine projects through the lens of Critical and Strategic Conservation, which is a new way of thinking about place making. It starts with the theory behind historic preservation and restoration, looking to canonical thinkers such as John Ruskin, Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, and Alois Riegl. It expands those theoretical boundaries by looking at Maurice Halbwachs' thoughts on collective memory, David Lowenthal's theories of the problematic past, and Emily Talen's proposition of the "incrementalist" approach to urban design. The discipline also contemplates virtual and other alternative conservation

techniques. While expressly applicable to the built environment, Critical and Strategic Conservation is equally applicable to greenfield design.

If the architects, planners, government officials, and citizens who planned the recovery of the Mississippi Gulf Coast had taken a more time-conscious approach in the mode of Critical and Strategic Conservation—an approach that openly debated the meaning of the past and the needs of the future— successes like Fort Maurepas Park would have been more common, and the rebuilt Coast would have both honored its heritage while better preparing for an uncertain future.

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Appendix A

Timeline showing the development of Hurricane Katrina:[26]

- August 23—The weather system that became Hurricane Katrina was a tropical depression over the Bahamas.
- August 24—The rapidly developing storm became the 11th named system of the active 2005 hurricane season.
- August 25—Hurricane Katrina crossed Florida, reaching hurricane strength shortly before landfall. The storm system was able to maintain its Category 1 force winds during much of its path over the peninsula.
- August 26, 5 a.m.—Katrina re-strengthened to Category 1 hurricane status.
- August 26, 11 a.m.—Katrina was upgraded to Category 2 status. Anticipating a potential Category 4 hurricane, the governors of Mississippi and Louisiana each declared a state of emergency.
- August 27, 5 a.m.—Moving across the extremely warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico, Katrina strengthened to a Category 3 storm.
- August 28, 2 a.m—Katrina strengthened to a Category 4 storm.
- August 28, 7 a.m.—Katrina strengthened to a Category 5 storm with maximum wind speeds of 175 mph and top sustained winds of 160 mph. The National Hurricane Center predicted maximum storm surges along the Mississippi Gulf Coast of 25 feet.
- August 29—Katrina strikes Louisiana and then Mississippi, with the eye of the storm traveling up the Pearl River, which separates the lower six Mississippi counties from Louisiana.

[26] Timeline is from CNN.com.